



**ESSAYS
IN THE
CULTURAL
HISTORY
OF RADIO**

RADIO

READER

Edited by Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio

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INTRODUCTION

(SPEAKING TO A LIVE national radio audience in 1936, the Federal Communications Commission's first chief commissioner, Anning S. Prall, hailed radio "as a combination of the schoolhouse, the church, the public rostrum, the newspaper, the theater, the concert hall—in fact, all media devoted to the education, enlightenment, and education of the people." At the same time, Prall quickly added, radio "claims a more intimate relationship with the public today than perhaps any other utility . . . because it is so close to Mr. and Mrs. Average Citizen and family."¹ An amalgam of nearly every public institution and a trusted guest in the private homes of millions of Americans, radio had by the 1930s announced itself as a new social space unifying the nation in the face of daunting social and economic uncertainty. Prall's themes—radio's centrality to national identity, its powerful claims on public and private registers of experience; and its displacement of older social institutions—were echoed by broadcasters, academics, and listeners as well. There was something about radio waves and their impervious mobility across social boundaries that served as an ideal symbol for national togetherness.

At the same time, the collapse of so many distinct modes of social organization into one mass medium was a source of concern. Indeed, the phrase "Mr. and Mrs. Average Citizen and family" captures the power of the new medium to transform individual listeners into an aggregated mass, a shift that many observers viewed as a threat to traditional notions of both community and individualism. In a more compelling way than any other medium, radio blurred the boundaries

between public and private and the important social identities subsumed by these categories. Still, the power of disembodied voices to embody powerful social identities, even those at odds with mainstream norms, made radio a site of controversy as well as national unity. Prall's comments came in the context of both congratulating the networks on their achievements and warning them to honor the public and private trusts given to them. This oscillation between praise and fear for radio's national voice was not unique to the FCC; on the contrary, ambivalence about radio's power was widespread and helped to structure a pattern of reaction to electronic media that persists to this day.

Radio no longer occupies an exclusive position as the only home-based electronic mass medium. Nor does the concept of the radio audience evoke notions of national unity; rather, it is the reverse, with a segmented nation of drive-time listeners, each isolated in his or her own demographic bandwidth. Abandoned by the networks for television in the late 1940s and further squeezed by the new digital revolution over the past decade, radio plays a diminished, but still daily, role in the public and private lives of most Americans. And from its more marginal perch on the media landscape, radio continues to be an important cultural form, troubling easy distinctions between public and private, raising questions about the relationship between the margins and center of national discourse, and continuing to emphasize the primacy of voice as a central and often controversial feature of identity.

This collection of essays presents the best recent scholarship on the continued cultural significance of radio in the United States. Taking a broad historical sweep, we have brought together articles tracing cumulatively the history of the medium, from the experimentation of the 1920s and the glory days of the '30s and '40s through radio's reorganization and redefinition in the postwar period and the present era of targeted talk, music formats, and digitization. This new work examines radio's powerful role in defining the boundaries of permissible social identities, radiating normative representations of gender, race, sexuality, and nationality, negotiating a new relationship between the purveyors and the consumers of radio's invisible address. In her introductory essay, Michele Hilmes summarizes the factors that led to radio's neglect and dismissal both as a cultural form and as an area of study, and assesses the changing conditions that have encouraged its scholarly revival. Kate Lacey theorizes the relationship between technological potential and social change via a comparison of public service, propaganda, and commercial models of broadcasting in the Depression era. Bruce Lenthall discusses the critical reception of US radio in the 1930s, focusing on the writings of William Orton and James Rorty, and considers their legacy for radio scholars today. Derek Vaillant examines the progressive agenda of University of Wisconsin broadcasting in the 1920s for the ways that it both enhanced and, at times, ran afoul of rural values. Jason Loviglio explores *Vox Pop*, network radio's first man-in-the-street program. He argues that early audi-

ence participation programs, in their intense preoccupation with “the voice of the people,” reveal network radio’s self-conscious construction of itself and its audience during the period when the network system was consolidating its political, commercial, and popular standing as the nation’s voice.

The new radio scholarship has attended to the medium’s transgressive power. Radio often played with the subversive potential of unseen voices, challenging and even mocking conventional social norms. It also allowed specialized arenas of American culture to reach a wider public, often redefining themselves in the process. Focusing on production, regulation, and reception, the emerging body of scholarship offers a new understanding of the cultural force of early radio. Tona Hangen turns to a consideration of the much-neglected topic of religion on radio. Her essay explores the career of Walter A. Maier and his *Lutheran Hour* program, showing the centrality of debates over religious programming in the regulatory and social context of radio. Matthew Murray analyzes American radio comedy’s treatment of sexuality and the controversies it provoked, using original archival research to uncover the limitations of permissible sexual identity and humor in some of US radio’s most popular shows. Kathy M. Newman examines the critique of commercial radio made by the consumer movement in the ’30s, drawing on the careers of James Rorty, Ruth Brindze, and Peter Morell.

World War II and the immediate postwar period form the backdrop for the next section of essays. Allison McCracken explores the construction of gender in the suspense dramas of the 1940s, showing how these programs helped to shape definitions of masculinity and femininity in an important transitional period. Judith E. Smith addresses the Cultural Front writers and cultural producers of the late ’30s and ’40s, analyzing the ways in which their efforts changed the political content of American broadcasting. Barbara Savage looks at how radio began to address the pressing problems of race in the World War II period, as programs such as *The University of Chicagoround Table* and *America’s Town Meeting of the Air* charted the evolution of a permissible political discourse about racial oppression and the emergence of a discourse about civil rights. Alexander Russo’s discussion of the popular series *The Green Hornet* focuses on the ways in which it mobilized “Oriental” tropes and stereotypes in anti-Axis war rhetoric. William F. O’Connor examines the careers and fates of American radio propagandists in the employ of the Axis powers, including Ezra Pound, Lord Haw-Haw, and Tokyo Rose. Susan Smulyan explores the influence of the United States on Japanese radio during the Allied occupation of Japan and the contradictions inherent in its task of “teaching democracy.”

Moving forward to the period of transition to television, Jason Mittell’s essay looks at the radio context of the quiz show scandal that rocked early network TV, arguing that it cannot be understood without a knowledge of the quiz show’s troubled history on radio. Jennifer Wang explores the ways that the broadcast-

ing industry imagined its audience as it attempted to encourage and negotiate the transition from the older medium to the new.

Some of these essays also recognize that radio did not die when television usurped its place in the living room. From the emergence of black-influenced deejays in the 1950s through the invention of format radio, the rediscovery of FM, underground radio, the rise of public radio, the explosive growth of talk radio, and, in the wake of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the defiant movement of microwatt "pirate" stations, radio in the video age hails a diverse array of smaller audiences. Eric Rothenbuhler and Tom McCourt examine the transformation of radio from a live, mass audience, network business to a local, fragmented, format-based medium in the '50s and early 1960s, using Austin, Texas, as a historical microcosm. Continuing in this vein, Michael Keith develops the story of format radio's collision with the sixties youth movement to produce underground radio, and that movement's eventual commercialization and demise. A different kind of alternative radio is examined in Jack Mitchell's essay on the origins of National Public Radio and its struggles with competing notions of public service and programming philosophy. Paul Riismandel follows up on this historical moment with a consideration of the history of low-power FM radio in its various attempts to establish an alternative to mainstream public and commercial radio.

Other recent scholarship places the fracturing of the radio market into the broader context of niche marketing, continued social and cultural differentiation, and the persistence of subaltern counterpublics in shaping the cultural landscape. John Fiske's essay on Black Liberation Radio considers the cultural and political role of African-American pirate broadcasting. Paul Apostolidis analyzes right-wing religious radio in the 1990s and its contested relationship not only with traditional religion but with the politics of resistance. Susan Douglas takes on the gender politics of '90s talk radio, looking in particular at Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh. The volume closes with Michael McCauley's analysis of the opportunities presented by the impending shift to digital broadcasting, considering both the possibilities and the perils of public service broadcasting in the digital age.

At this historical moment, when music, news, and talk can be heard via the Internet, satellite, and MP3 sound files, and movies and television programs can be accessed via video-on-demand technologies, the future of radio as a distinct medium, and of broadcasting as a technological mode, is no longer certain. In some ways, however, radio appears to be only now coming into its own, as investors and scholars alike turn to it as the source of outrageous fortune and insight into American culture, respectively. Since the Telecommunications Act of 1996, over 25% of the nation's radio stations have changed hands, making it the most profitable of the mass media for investors and concentrating radio station ownership to an unprecedented degree. And over the last ten years inter-

disciplinary scholarship on the cultural history of radio has blossomed. Still, attention to radio's more recent decades remains sparse. As always, radio remains a difficult medium to study: invisible, evanescent, pushed to the margins of mainstream media, rarely talked about and easily overlooked. Its current reliance on non-narrative forms such as music and talk continue to position it outside the boundaries of most scholarly research, in a place where only the most innovative of researchers dare to tread. We are proud to be able to bring together such an impressive body of new scholarship about the medium that has done more than any other to define and shape national consciousness during the last century, and promises to remain lively and vital far into the future. It is our hope that the essays gathered here will inspire more questions and debates than they settle, and lead a new generation of scholars to explore the underestimated power of radio's invisible voices.

Notes

1. Mutual Broadcasting System's inaugural coast-to-coast broadcast, September 1936, University of Memphis Radio Archive.

CHAPTER I**RETHINKING RADIO**

Michele Hilmes

In advanced industrial societies there is a radical disjuncture: radio is everybody's private possession, yet no one recognizes it in public.

—Peter M. Lewis

WHAT HAPPENED TO RADIO? For eighty years it has played a significant role in American lives and American culture, as it has in cultures around the world. For its first forty years it provided one of our primary means of negotiating the boundaries between public life and the private home, becoming the American family's "electronic hearth" (Tichi), our central acculturating and nationalizing influence during the turbulent decades of the '20s, '30s, '40s, and '50s. After television usurped much of this role, radio became the background sound of our lives, our most persistent and ubiquitous media companion, losing the main spotlight of prime time in the living room but keeping us company during the rest of the day in our kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms, automobiles, offices, and workshops; serenading us while we walked and jogged; filling us in on local and national news, sports reports and play-by-play, weather, school closings, and emergency bulletins; and generally serving as a vital, though ancillary, component of our informational and entertainment universe. It brought us each successive new wave of popular music while preserving older and regional styles, allowed groups marginalized by mainstream media to meet electronically to discuss, share, and organize, and sold us consumer goods by the billions.

Yet this invisible permeation of our lives has gone remarkably unstudied. Scorned as “merely” a popular culture phenomenon in its most prominent decades, radio had barely begun to attract serious aesthetic and political attention when television suddenly eclipsed it. Attention turned to the new visual and aural medium, which hit the ground running not only with the industrial structure, textual forms, and audience formations inspired by radio but also with the accumulating weight of sociological study and critical concern. Television scholars pretended that television had sprung into the world fully formed in the early 1950s, and simply dismissed the decades of aural innovation that preceded it. Radio faded rapidly into the background of American social thought. In colleges and universities, though a radio production class often catered to students’ career desires and a campus radio station livened up the local media offerings, the industrial, theoretical, aesthetic, and historical study of radio all but vanished—or placed radio solely in an anticipatory role for television. This was not true in all countries, but in the United States many elements came together to “disappear” radio study, even as the academic consideration of other media—such as journalism, film, and later television—began to rise and find secure spots in the curriculum. From the 1950s through the ’80s a few lonely and persistent voices published radio work;¹ a few organizations kept alive the memory of radio in its glory days;² a thriving industry operated largely under the radar of academics and cultural critics. Only in the last ten years has this massive act of public “forgetting” begun to shift, and once again young scholars (and a few older ones) from a variety of disciplinary homes are putting radio back into the central positions it deserves. The “missing decades” of the ’30s and ’40s, in particular, have captured the imaginations of cultural historians, even as the regulatory politics of the ’90s have thrust radio back into the spotlight—not necessarily in a flattering way.

Why?: Roots of Forgetfulness

I want to open this volume of new radio work by considering some of the factors that caused radio first to be forgotten and then, increasingly, to be remembered and reconsidered. The roots of this phenomenon are, it seems to me, multiple and complex, having to do with industrial pressures, shifting cultural patterns, new historiographical concerns, and changing theoretical paradigms. What worked to keep radio relatively subterranean from the ’50s through the ’80s met with a host of different agendas and conditions in the early ’90s—even as radio itself went through a general blandifying process with small pockets of resistance holding out. As a result, radio is finally being included in American cultural histories; musicologists increasingly recognize radio’s role in the formation and dissemination of musical culture; the field of media studies has begun to broaden its preoccupation with the visual to include considerations of sound; and though

other countries such as Great Britain and Canada still maintain a far livelier field of original, creative radio production than we have seen in this country since the 1940s, at least scholars and producers from various national traditions have begun to take note of each other and draw on each other's experience. What changed?

It seems clear that as World War II brought the radio era to a triumphant new high, a much fuller recognition of, and accounting for, radio's cultural role was at hand. During the Depression radio had seized hold of the national imagination. A hugely profitable industry had grown up. A national audience consisting of the vast majority of Americans tuned in to a wide variety of entertainment and information that reassured and unified the nation through hard economic times and wartime strife (Cohen; Czitrom; Hilmes, *Radio Voices* MacFadden; A. Douglas). Radio had taken on a central role in the nation's political life, from President Roosevelt's addresses to a new crop of news, discussion, and propaganda programs that recruited the nation for war and hashed out its inequities (Savage; Horten). The nation's reliance on wartime news only cemented this key position. By the mid- to late 1940s a new breed of radio regulators and producers, empowered by the wartime vision of what radio could be, agitated for regulatory reform and a more serious political role for creative radio work. The Federal Communication Commission's Blue Book of 1947 laid out this new vision to industry outcry, even as—outside the scope of regulatory reform—social and market forces began to open radio up to the voices and concerns of women, youth, and minorities (both ethnic and political), long ghettoized or excluded from the airwaves.

Industrial Distraction

It is at this very moment that television enters the scene, distracting attention from radio and relegating it to secondary status. As television's picture strengthened, radio's voices began to fade into the background. The industry itself contributed the first powerful blow to radio's prominence, not only for economic reasons but also for political and cultural ones. Many historians have traced the US television industry's deliberate cannibalizing of radio to feed television's gaping maw (Boddy; Fornatale and Mills; Spigel, *Make Room*). As the war ended, factories that had been churning out military technology and goods looked around for a new function. Radio sets had achieved a point of saturation in the consumer market, while television barely reached a fraction of the American public, which was now busily equipping suburban homes with the latest in consumer goods. To stimulate the growth of television set sales, all three major networks plus struggling fourth network Du Mont lobbied their hardest to transfer radio's most successful artists and programs from one medium to the other and to persuade advertisers to switch their allegiance to the developing television market. For a brief period major shows were simulcast—their audio portions aired on radio while the full

video version played on TV—but by 1955 the vast bulk of radio's established programming capital was hard at work bringing in profits for television.) During the transition period, the major networks actually diverted advertising income from their radio operations to prop up their nascent television divisions, further weakening the older medium. Radio, gutted and demoralized, struggled to adapt.

Meantime, as so often happens in history, to the victor went the spoils of memory. The television networks began to tell their own stories, distancing themselves from their controversial performance during the radio decades and promising a bright new day of education, information, and enlightenment in the home. Several scholars have traced the ways that the major networks joined in the celebration of the era of live drama, as a way of holding up a superior cultural form in contrast to the potential threat that Hollywood and its filmed programming offered (Boddy; Anderson; Hilmes, *Hollywood*; Vianello). Soap operas, one of the most socially disreputable of radio's offerings, were kept off the daytime television airwaves until late in the 1950s, and the serial form was banned from prime time. The quiz show scandals of the late '50s presented the networks with a chance to break the hold that sponsors had held over broadcast programming since the 1930s, and they seized it in an atmosphere of high seriousness and cultural uplift, promising more-responsible performance and a higher level of program quality. The example of commercial radio, with its sponsor-dominated production and highly criticized popular programming, had to be pushed far into the background if this newly burnished image were to be maintained. Television needed to forget radio in order to take advantage of its temporary golden position with regulators and social critics. And as a new generation of TV-created stars and producers began to emerge in the '60s, television's erasure of radio days seemed complete.

Cultural Marginality

Radio's new localized and fragmented address presented little to contradict television's historical re-visioning. Turning its attention to audiences outside the mainstream, radio became the place where those culturally excluded from television's address could regroup and find a new identity. As the network system crumbled, a greater degree of localism entered the radio market than had been seen since the 1920s. This worked particularly well for the nation's largest ethnic minority, African Americans, and a host of stations and formats sprang up to serve neglected black communities across the country. The DJ format, with scattered roots in recording-based shows during the radio network era, took on new life and a distinct character rooted in black culture (Barlow). This phenomenon would eventually lead to the rise of rock-and-roll radio, catering to another previously overlooked but newly powerful minority, the nation's youth (S. Douglas, *Where, Listening*). Tired of waiting for television to recognize the youth culture

propelled by the baby boom, young people of all ages and social groups turned to the radio to hear the music that mattered in their lives—even as their parents continued to rely on the sounds of an older generation, such as Perry Como, Arthur Godfrey, Lawrence Welk, and Arthur Murray, now featured on television. This appeal to youth and racial minorities did nothing to enhance radio's cultural credibility with the academic and critical mainstream. Radio became a medium more reviled than studied, more frequently dismissed than addressed. Its cultural status shifted ever downward, though its importance in the lives of its local and marginal audiences solidified and grew.

Historiographical Erasure

If the sheer novelty of dominant TV technology and the discredited status of radio as a cultural form were not enough to deter the attention of academics and historians, the form of history being practiced during the middle decades of the century itself resisted recognition of radio's influence. The 1950s and early '60s marked the high point of "consensus history" in the United States, a form of historical scholarship prevalent in mainstream and popular accounts, though already under attack in the academy. It reflected the influence of "modernization theory," a response to Marxist historical models, which proposed capitalist economic development as a universal, modernizing process with its roots in the West but with implications for the rest of the world (Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob). This was the era of the "end of ideology," of a progressive view of American national history that emphasized consensus, assimilation, and the "natural" rise of democracy and freedom buoyed by marketplace capitalism. As one of its early proponents, Daniel Lerner, put it:

There is a single process of modernization which operates in all developing societies—regardless of their colour, creed, or climate and regardless of their history, geography, or culture. This is the process of economic development, and . . . development cannot be sustained without modernization. (Qtd. in Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 84)

Modernization had not only an economic component but also an intellectual and psychological one, emphasizing the necessity of producing "a rational and autonomous self that was essential to modernization" (Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 85). Television could be employed as both an exemplar and a cheerleader for this vision of history, at once embodying the progress of Western development, presenting a means for spreading American values abroad, and drawing all into its majoritarian, economically driven address (Curtin). In this vision, radio was an older, defective technology that had played its part but now had been succeeded by a superior medium. To question television's conquest of the audience, furthermore, might be to call into question the very workings of modern-

ization and marketplace democracy itself. Looking back at abandoned potentials or discarded possibilities—or tracing the confluence of corporate and government power that produced them—did not suit the mood of US historical scholarship. Radio lay outside the consensus of history.

Theoretical Impossibility

Finally, though the study of popular culture slowly began to permeate the academy, the routes it took also tended to preclude the study of radio. The rising field of social science research turned its attention to the increasingly controversial effects of television on children and other susceptible groups, funded by government grants and supported by social and regulatory outcry. Along with the spotlight, radio lost its ability to generate grant dollars; meanwhile, marketing research in the service of the television industry captured much of the academic research agenda through its abundant supply of funds. By the 1960s government grants and corporate funding for social-science-based research not only had turned attention away from radio but had led to the most established branch of broadcasting studies turning its back on its previous critical focus.

In the humanities, radio's cultural marginality and lowbrow roots worked against academic legitimation. The 1960s saw the entrance of film studies into the curriculum of more-advanced colleges and universities, propelled by a strategy of raising the medium's cultural status through an explicit articulation to literature and the visual arts. Advocates of film study initially based their lobbying for film respectability on the *auteur* theory, treating directors as authors and films as expressive individual works of art. The primary component of the *auteur's* artistry was the visual *mise-en-scène* of the film, its strategy of narration through visual elements, and though sound was recognized as an important ancillary component, its study remained subsumed under the dominance of the visual. Neither radio's auralty nor its "authorless," lowbrow, commercialized status allowed it to benefit from film's legitimating strategy.)

The television industry jumped on board the highbrow bandwagon as part of the networks' drive for respectability. CBS and NBC had engaged in an active defense against charges of philistinism for years by pointing out, in lavishly produced brochures and booklets, the many examples of "quality" programming they claimed to produce. In 1960 CBS commissioned an edited volume of television criticism, drawing on various critics and academics and titling it *The Eighth Art*. In 1962 the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences founded the journal *Television Quarterly* (Spigel, "Making"). With it they hoped to stimulate informed aesthetic criticism of television. As their mission statement put it:

Those who are associated with the planning of this Journal believe it is time for a penetrating, provocative and continuing examination of tel-

evision as an art, a science, an industry, and a social force. Accordingly, our purpose is to be both independent and critical. We hold that the function of this Journal is to generate currents of new ideas about television, and we will therefore try to assure publication of all material which stimulates thought and has editorial merit. This Journal has only one aim—to take a serious look at television. (*Television Quarterly* 1. 1 [1962])

The editor was A. William Bluem, a professor at Syracuse University. Editorial board members were drawn from industry and journalism for the most part, with Sydney H. Eiges of NBC as chairman and Walter Cronkite as cochairman. Other members included Chet Huntley, Gilbert Seldes, Robert Lewis Shayon, and Hubbell Robinson of CBS. They began to publish a combination of academic and journalistic work on television that would form a conservative alternative to the public emphasis on social science research shaping up around the violence issues (Kompore).

On the left, radical criticism of the media also militated against its serious study. The legacy of the Frankfurt School dominated leftist scholars' thinking on radio and television in particular, with all commercial, corporate manifestations of popular culture tarred with the same derogatory brush. Commercial culture remained highly suspect culture, no matter what its popularity or how varied its uses. Aside from the slowly burgeoning Pacifica chain of stations and a few community broadcasting efforts, US radio (along with television) seemed completely captured by capitalism to a greater extent even than most other media.³ In 1957 the groundbreaking volume *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* appeared, struggling to mediate between the Frankfurian disdain for mass culture and the more accepting, still emergent "popular arts" approach. Its two editors personified the problems inherent in a left-informed analysis of the commercial popular media. Bernard Rosenberg, an editor for *Dissent* magazine and a lecturer at the New School for Social Research, articulated the Frankfurt School's suspicion of commercial mass culture and excoriated the lowbrow standards of the benighted audiences who supported it. David Manning White, a professor of journalism at Boston University, took a more supportive, liberal-pluralist stance, defending the popular arts, despite their commercialism, as capable of achieving excellence if properly encouraged. The two could not even agree to write a joint introduction, pulled between the tensions of the book's basic question: "Should we adopt the classic intellectual rejection of mass culture, or should we give mass culture our 'critical support'?" (Rosenberg and White 18). Its contributors included "literary critics, social scientists, journalists and art critics" writing not just on television but on movies, jazz, comic books, popular literature, and advertising—with radio, significantly, out of the picture completely.⁴

Throughout this process of increasing legitimacy for other media, most markedly TV and film, radio remained an anachronistic embarrassment, the discarded chrysalis of a new technology that could now emerge into glorious (or dreadful) maturity. And its contemporary incarnation, as a fragmented, local medium playing rock and roll to racial minorities and unruly youth, hardly represented the kind of high culture that film and television advocates—industrial or academic, left-wing or conservative—were anxious to endorse. The development of underground radio in the late '60s and '70s brought a certain cachet to creative, politically informed broadcasting within youth culture, but the competing rise of format radio and its attendant commercialization and standardization continued to keep current radio practices well below the horizon of critical respect (Keith). When public television struggled into existence in 1967, funding for public radio was added as an afterthought, and thoroughly discouraged by some.⁵ Commercial radio, regarded by radical critics as mere “dialing for dollars” and by more conservative commentators as a particularly egregious example of populism run amuck, had virtually dropped from academic sight in the United States by the late 1970s. Industrially, culturally, historiographically, and theoretically, radio had been rendered invisible by the temper of the times.

The Return of the Radio Repressed

What did it take for radio to emerge from the historical doghouse into better quarters in the main rooms? The late 1990s, in particular, saw a sudden blossoming of radio studies, from a variety of different fields in a variety of directions.⁶ Once marginalized, radio not only has become a part of media studies and journalism curricula but has begun to figure prominently in accounts of twentieth-century American history and culture written by scholars from many different backgrounds.⁷ Again, the roots of radio resurgence are many and varied, but this time the primary vehicle of return seems to begin in academic theory.

Seeing Culture in a New Light

In the early 1980s a new theoretical paradigm began to reach American shores, having first appeared in England in the work of the Birmingham School. In the United States it would be taken up by a variety of disciplines, but the field of media has always been central to cultural studies, as the new approach came to be called. Deliberately calling into question assumed hierarchies of high and low, of seriousness and triviality, of “quality” and “trash,” cultural studies scholars turned their attention to formerly disparaged media forms such as girls' magazines, working-class style, popular music, romance novels, television, and eventually even radio (Hall and Jefferson; Hebdige; McRobbie; Radway; Frith).

With the introduction of feminist and critical race theory into the mix—and the later addition of queer theory—the study of formerly “low” forms, as well as interrogation of what propped up the “high,” allowed new light to be shed on the critical dismissal of popular culture by both conservative academics and their Frankfurtian colleagues (see, for instance, Gray; Torres; D’Acci; Allen; Fiske; Zook; Doty). Perhaps low forms spoke in a language below the notice of relatively elite academic analysts. Perhaps they could be understood as equally complex and meaningful as more legitimate forms, and far better at connecting with their working-class, female, and minority audiences—as well as with the greater mainstream. Perhaps what mattered was how audiences understood and used media, rather than the former assumption that the intentions of the producers determined all that could be thought and said. Attention broadened beyond the sphere of producers and artists, to encompass a focus on audience reception, use, and meaning making. Within this context, radio’s very exclusion from the realm of the academically acceptable became a signal of its underground cultural importance. What was hiding under those decades of critical neglect?

New Histories

A new type of history writing began to uncover previously neglected aspects of radio. Influenced by the theoretical trends of the last decades of the twentieth century, historiography too had begun to change. From its former insistence on consensus and unified narratives, the new movement toward social history turned to those factors that traditional histories had obscured, excluded, or marginalized. The minutiae of everyday life; the repressed histories of women, gays, minorities, and the working class; the traces of conflict and opposition; and the identification of new forms of historical evidence—all these, taken together, led to a rewriting of the American story, and indeed to a questioning of the role of nation itself. New histories traced the workings of power in its various forms not only through the events of the past but through the processes of historiography. The influence of other disciplines, from sociology to psychology to art and musicology, began to determine the kinds of questions historians asked and the kind of answers they found.

In media study, television slowly gained status as a subject of historical analysis, its role as central purveyor of, and player in, national culture and history finally revealed beneath the layers of disdain and neglect. Film too received a more culturally embedded treatment, less tied to the aesthetic approach that had prevailed. Study of the media industries grew in importance as media converged, merged, and contracted, and many of the “givens” of media practice, formerly considered beneath notice, were subjected to historical interrogation.

Radio began to benefit from this historiographical shift—though slowly and more in some areas than others. Formerly marginal or obscured practices—minority stations, local innovations, women’s programs, religious broadcasting, negotiations of gender and race in mainstream media, politically resistant broadcasts and culturally debased formats such as serials and talk and quiz shows—became the object of renewed interest. This was particularly true for the pretelevision period. Posttelevision radio, on the other hand, has yet to benefit from the same kind of social interest or scholarly study. Both of these phenomena—the attention given to prewar radio and the neglect of the postwar scene—have to do with changes in radio’s cultural role and status.

Safe to Study

By the late 1980s radio’s earliest decades had lost much of their former cultural threat and become safely ensconced in the nostalgic aura of the distant past. In an era of television, the clearer and present danger, the decades of radio’s prominence as a national medium seemed quaint, intriguing, even respectable. In history departments, political science departments, and American studies programs, as well as in communications and media studies fields, radio began to receive the academic attention denied it since its birth. The decades of the 1920s through the ’40s, in particular, attracted scholarly and popular focus. Formerly overlooked in accounts of twentieth-century US history, radio now began to be perceived as part of the social glue that held America—and other nations—together. Though its evanescent nature made it less useful to historians than the print journalism that forms such an important basis for historical scholarship, radio could no longer simply be left out of the historical record. Negotiations of cultural and political power around, in, and on the air received recognition as vitally important and central parts of both everyday and national life, inseparable from the larger struggles and currents of American and world history (see, in this volume, essays by Loviglio, Murray, Hangen, McCracken, Smith, Savage, Russo, O’Connor, Mittell, and Wang). Radio archives and museums began to gain attention. New York opened its prestigious Museum of Television and Radio in 1975; Chicago established its Museum of Broadcasting in 1983; and Los Angeles weighed in with its glossy branch of the New York organization in 1993. Other key archives, such as those in the Library of Congress, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the University of California, Los Angeles, archive, the Library of American Broadcasting at the University of Maryland, College Park, and the Hartmann Center for the Study of Advertising at Duke University, drew scholars from many fields interested in the development of this broadcasting medium.

Yet again most of this attention stops at the point at which network radio gives way to the localized, music-centered, and format-driven business that it

became in the late 1950s. Format radio still attracts little but disdain from academic researchers, despite a few notable exceptions (S. Douglas, *Listening, Wall*). Not until the rise of political talk radio in the '80s did the medium begin to receive some scholarly and critical attention, mostly from a sociological perspective. Meantime, the number of hours that Americans spend listening to their radios every day continues to grow. Yet contradictory developments in the radio industry since the '80s have worked to render contemporary radio less and less "discussable" even as the stakes grow higher.

Industrial Contradictions

The radio industry has gone through a variety of cycles since its nadir as a medium in the 1960s, diversifying its formats to reach most segments of the population, not just the young. By the mid-1980s all demographic groups listened to the radio, often in the shape of formats specifically geared to them, and with the rise of call-in programs and talk radio a new era of political and social controversy began. Reaching its apogee in the popularity and political influence of Rush Limbaugh in the early '90s, radio's captains of consciousness included a wide variety of controversial and outrageous figures, from Howard Stern and Dr. Laura to Larry King. The growth of National Public Radio through its turbulent first decades and into the more stable '90s showed a mature listening public what serious, informative, and creative radio might sound like. From *All Things Considered* to *Prairie Home Companion*, and encompassing a wide variety of innovative programs in between, public radio helped to redeem the cultural status long denied the medium as a whole.

Furthermore, radio's demographically fragmented status made it a perfect arena in which to observe the operations of the many "subaltern counter-publics," to use a term borrowed from Nancy Fraser, that had adopted the relatively low-cost and interactive medium as a place to mark out new forms of cultural identity and debate (Fraser, *passim*; Squires). The rise of syndication in the '80s meant that formerly small, scattered populations could now rally around a unifying, nationally distributed minority forum. From stations directed at one primary ethnic group—notably to black, Latino, and Asian populations—to programs targeted at different age groups, identities, musical tastes, specialized interests, and political opinions, radio's capacity for "nationalized locality" made it a valuable medium for communication, discussion, and cultural cohesion across geographical boundaries. The idea of community, so central to broadcast regulation, began to shift from its former definition as a purely local phenomenon to something that might extend across an entire nation. The alternative and community radio pioneered in the turbulent '60s and '70s struggled on in hundreds of cities and towns, providing a setting for local voices and concerns to be heard and contributing to the vitality of US cultural and political life.

However, (at the corporate level the 1990s witnessed an explosion of mergers and ever-narrowing control. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 removed some of the previous barriers to ownership of multiple stations in the same market, provoking a wave of station purchases and consolidation of territory. Many smaller cities woke up one morning in 1997 or 1998 to find that a single radio conglomerate now owned half of their local broadcasting stations. By early 1999 the merger of Chancellor Media, Clear Channel Communications, and Capstar made the resulting company, Chancellor Media, the single largest owner of radio stations in the world, with over 488 stations across the country. Its ownership of five or six stations in large cities such as New York and Los Angeles may not represent an enormous percentage of the lively radio market there, but in cities such as Fresno, California, where Chancellor now owns nine radio stations, or Spokane, Washington, where it owns eleven, the giant conglomerate drowns out almost all other radio voices in the area. The four largest companies together (Chancellor, CBS, ABC, and Emmis) control over 75% of the radio audience in the ten largest US metropolitan areas. This squelching of radio's much-prized diversity by corporate behemoths at the top has once again thrown radio into cultural disapproval. Yet so far, despite the spread of standardized formats on a national level, the local scene appears fairly diverse, supplemented as it is with public, community, and a few holdout locally owned stations. In most cities there are more radio stations operating today than ever before, giving an impression, at least, of something for everyone. And the rise of Internet distribution of both music and traditional broadcast radio promises even greater diversity for those who can receive it.

Yet increasingly radio forms just one component of the media conglomerates organized in the 1990s, working toward the much-vaunted "synergy" that promises to integrate all media into a giant publicity and promotion machine. Will being the audio arena for music videos, movie soundtracks, news coverage, and discussion of all these matters raise radio's profile? Or will the very definition of radio change, as wired Internet connection evolves to wireless and music, talk, and entertainment can be called up program by program, source by source? Will there still be a role for the over-the-air station, on a local if not a national level? The recent push for creation of a system of low-power radio stations reminds us that technology penetrates to all levels of the population slowly and irregularly. And why can't we, in this age of media abundance and diversity, enjoy here in the United States the variety of radio forms still available in less commercial national systems? Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and other countries where public broadcasting has a strong tradition preserve bastions of radio drama, serials, documentaries, music alternatives, and art radio that have long been forgotten in the United States. It is easy to overlook radio's long history of creativity, flexibility, innovation, and experimentation in a culture dominated by market-driven formats.

What Next?

This volume marks and celebrates the new era of radio resurgence and, in the vitality and currency of its authors' approaches, signals the relevance of radio to issues of culture, politics, nation, identity, history, and the media developments of today. It also points out the areas that have received so little attention as to practically leap off the page when they are mentioned. Clearly much more remains to be done in radio studies, particularly in the more contemporary period but also in the fascinating decades of radio's reign as our primary national medium. One area that has received little attention in this country since the publication of Rudolf Arnheim's singular work in 1936 is the field of radio aesthetics. Again, radio as a field and as an artistic endeavor had reached a point in the late 1940s at which its unique properties as a medium, and the art and technique of aural expression, had just begun to receive some attention, but then television erased the memory banks. Since then film scholars have begun to devote attention to sound in film, inclusive of music, dialogue, and effects, and much of their work has direct relevance for those interested in radio.⁸ However, in the absence of a vital creative radio production tradition in the United States, much of the groundbreaking work in this field is being done in other countries, whose broadcasting institutions have allowed the field of radio to continue on a number of fronts without the artificial narrowing so prevalent in this country.⁹ But even commercial radio can be illuminated by an approach that treats musical formats not as mere commercial formulas, but as important culture-defining and boundary-reinforcing exercises, such as Tim Wall's recent article on black music formats in Britain (see also the essays by Douglas, Apolostolidis, Rothenbuhler and McCourt, and Keith in this volume). More of this kind of scholarship would broaden radio's theoretical base and strengthen its ties with a variety of disciplines.

Another area needing further exploration is the field of radio in everyday life. Television has received some excellent attention as a medium of popular use, and analysis of television's uses and functions in domestic and national life has benefited from the groundbreaking work of such scholars as Ien Ang, David Morley, Julie D'Acci, and many more. Little exists that extends such an approach to radio, though Susan Douglas's most recent work, *Listening In*, goes a long way in this direction. Susan Squires uses public sphere theory to assess the impact of black talk radio on Chicago's political and cultural scene (see also the essays of Smith, Lenthall, Vaillant, Newman, and Fiske in this volume). Such approaches are more common in the realm of international media studies, since radio still remains the primary communications medium in many countries, especially the third world. A greater attention to audience and meaning making from a cultural studies perspective could help to bring radio into the mainstream of academic study and provide a necessary and provocative corollary to the many

important findings in the area of television. For instance, why do radio stars such as Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh, and Dr. Laura Schlessinger thrive on radio but fail to draw audiences on television? What is it about both media that encourage certain kinds of content or address? What roles does radio fill in the television information and entertainment universe—for instance, why does the new cultural wave of hip-hop thrive on radio while remaining marginalized by other media? Can we understand audiences' patterns of news consumption without taking radio into account? How might radio drama operate alongside the narrative possibilities so abundant on television? These are a few questions that rest fundamentally on patterns of use and habits of understanding the two media, and they can be answered only by paying attention to radio's functions in everyday life.

Third, radio has been largely overlooked in the recent political discussions about media and power. As noted above, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 had enormous implications for the structure of the radio industry, yet these went even more undiscussed and neglected than that act's impact on television. Radio remains perennially the stepchild of media attention despite its demonstrated ability to sway political opinion, set cultural trends, and figure in the world of advice, discussion, and identity formation (Lewis). Yet ironically, the focus on the big-business-dominated side of radio, exemplified by concentration of ownership and homogenization of formats, works to obscure the immense variety and vitality still present in most US cities. In this case neglect may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If critics and social observers are convinced that there is nothing to be said about radio, their observation may indeed come true. More attention needs to be paid to the resistant side of radio, to the public and community broadcasters presenting lively and innovative radio work, and to the low-power movement in all its forms, including the illegal pirate stations so prevalent in the '90s (see the essays by Mitchell, Fiske, Riisman, and McCauley in this volume).

Finally, work on radio tends to maintain a narrowly nationalistic focus. Most media scholars working in the United States today know little, and seem to care less, about what is going on outside our national borders in the invisible, evanescent field of radio. In fact, radio presents unique opportunities around the globe, from the art sound of German experimenters and the complex dramas and documentaries in the United Kingdom, to the voices of revolutionary movements in Central America, memories of the Holocaust, and the call for long-lost relatives in Israel. Even more so than television, radio's international dimensions are overlooked, unless it is the output of government-sponsored international organizations such as the Voice of America or the BBC World Service. Not that these organizations have been sufficiently studied—anyone interested in the face of US nationalism abroad over the last fifty years overlooks our aural propaganda outlets, however invisible, at his or her own peril.¹⁰ More than this, however, a truly cross-cultural historical approach to radio has much to teach us, as

Kate Lacey, Susan Smulyan, and William O'Connor point out in this volume. Neither radio nor television developed in a nation-bound cocoon, despite the dominant discourse (produced so strongly by the broadcasters themselves). In fact, they took shape within an active dialogue with each other around issues of political structure, public service, economics, populism, and cultural carryovers and resistances—a dialogue that has never ceased. These mutually constructive tendencies have only recently begun to be hinted at, as national boundaries break down under globalizing media. National systems constructed in opposition to each other—such as those of the United States and the United Kingdom—used each other as necessary components of their own identities and structures (Hilmes, “Who”). They cannot be truly understood in splendid, flag-waving isolation.

Conclusion

The rise, and fall, and rise of radio's status as an important cultural medium thus has lessons for those in many fields. Its most striking aspect is the virtual disappearance of meaningful recognition of a creative, powerful, and enormously influential cultural form from the histories and collective memory of a significant portion of the twentieth century. What else is out there, lurking at the margins of the barely knowable? A few things immediately come to mind in the field of media alone: magazine culture generally, an amazingly neglected field of study; local forms of radio and television, difficult to research but still accessible; the overlooked tradition of Latina/o media in the United States, only now gaining some attention; and the elided histories of such important media “middlemen” as our ratings systems, research organizations, funding institutions, and lobbying groups. Another important factor to consider might be how nostalgia (particularly for “old-time” radio) works as a cultural filter, preserving aspects of neglected social phenomena while actively obscuring many others. And finally there is the issue of nationalism, the national myopia around the study of media and of cultures, which this volume does a little to remedy but on which much more remains to be said. Why not global media, including radio, in everyone's home? Perhaps Americans would at last be stimulated to learn to speak other languages, and there is much diverse work either done in English or needing no translation (as the international music scene has showed us). With digital technologies, radio is entering a new era in this century. Both its past and its present need reawakened attention if we hope to learn the media lessons of history.

Notes

1. Besides Erik Barnouw and his groundbreaking three-volume *History of Broadcasting in the United States*, written between 1966 and 1970, J. Fred MacDonald provided one of the very few histories of radio programming in *Don't Touch That Dial!: Radio Programming in American*

Life, 1920–1960 (1972), and Raymond Stedman traced the evolution of one of radio's most prominent forms in *The Serials: Suspense and Drama by Installment* (1977). Arthur Wertheim's *Radio Comedy* (1979) preserved the legacy of early broadcast comedians and the influential forms they innovated. Harrison B. Summers published his meticulous tracing of thirty years of network radio schedules as a dissertation in 1958, but Arno Press reprinted it in 1971, to the eternal gratitude of radio historians everywhere. A few invaluable encyclopedias of radio programming also began to appear in the '70s, notably Buxton and Owen's *The Big Broadcast* (1972) and Vincent Terrace's *Radio's Golden Years* (1981). Lichty and Topping's highly useful *American Broadcasting: A Source Book on the History of Radio and Television* (1975) helped to preserve many original articles and documents for historical memory. And broadcasting, both radio and TV, got its first textbook in the late '70s in the form of Christopher Sterling and John Kittross's comprehensive *Stay Tuned* (1978), though its focus is primarily on industry and regulation.

2. Many organizations dedicated to preserving the memory of old-time radio sprang up in the '60s and '70s. Some of the larger ones include the Society to Preserve and Encourage Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy (SPERDVAC), based in the Los Angeles area (<http://www.pe.net/~rnovak/spervdvcx.htm>); the North American Radio Archives, in Cincinnati; and the Friends of Old Time Radio, run by Jay Hickerson. Popular books such as Jim Harmon's *The Great Radio Heroes* (1967) and *The Great Radio Comedians* (1970) began to appear in the 1960s, along with many memoirs and biographies of radio's pioneers and celebrities.

3. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer had laid down the basic components of Marxist thinking on the commercial media in their 1947 "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment As Mass Deception." Adorno revisited the issue with an even more ringing condemnation in 1967 in "The Culture Industry Reconsidered."

4. The book contained a section headed "Television and Radio," but all five essays concerned themselves with television.

5. For a compelling narrative of radio's last-minute rescue from public funding exclusion, see Hoynes, *Public Television for Sale*, and Ledbetter, *Made Possible By . . .*

6. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* saw fit to recognize this phenomenon in 1999 with an article on the new radio research, focused around a few panels at the 1998 American Studies Association conference; see Peter Monaghan, "Exploring Radio's Sociocultural Legacy." Many of the contributors to this volume have published significant works in the renaissance of radio study in the United States; see the bibliography of this essay.

7. For instance, Warren Susman was one of the earliest historians of the twentieth century to turn his attention to the importance of cultural industries and texts as part of the social context, including radio; see *Culture As History*. Ann Douglas's behemoth *Terrible Honesty* sees technologies such as recording and radio as key elements of the negotiation of ethnicity and race in the New York of the 1920s. Burton Peretti's history of jazz in its early decades centrally locates radio. Lizabeth Cohen's history of the Depression and the New Deal analyzes radio as well as film and chain retailing as important facets of social cohesion that enabled labor organizing in the '30s and '40s.

8. See, for instance, the sound-studies list maintained by the University of Iowa Sound Research Group at sound-studies@uiowa.edu.

9. At the AudioHyperspace site <<http://www.swr2.de/hoerspiel/audiohyperspace/links.html>>, there are links to information on the history of acoustic media art, the history of everyday life's sounds, acoustic web art, experimental radio on demand, audio archives, radio stations live online, artists' audio presentations, and background materials. The Radio Studies list, based in Britain, offers discussion and resources about radio as a field at <<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/radio-studies.html>>.

10. And information about them is now widely available to citizens of the United States for the first time on the Web, at <<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/broadcas.htm>>. This is the State Department's site for the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty,

Radio/TV Martí, and Radio Free Asia. Interestingly, you still can't link to it directly from the usinfo.state.gov site, in keeping with the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act, which forbids propaganda to be distributed domestically.

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CHAPTER 2**RADIO IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION****Promotional Culture, Public Service, and
Propaganda**

Kate Lacey

IT IS ALMOST A TRUISM that historians setting out to justify their work will identify the period they have chosen to review as one of crisis or transition, and it is also true that histories of the Great Depression are particularly characterized by a vocabulary of transformation. Nevertheless, the language of crisis and transition cannot be avoided in the context of any cultural history of the early 1930s, and it will certainly pervade this essay in which I will argue that the crisis of the Great Depression was perhaps the key transformational moment in the broadcasting histories of three states—the United States, Great Britain, and Germany—and the period when three apparently very different models of broadcasting became entrenched in response to the crisis.

The early thirties was a period when the still youthful media technology of radio fed dramatically and controversially into social and political change, and when broad social and political transformations contributed to the generation of new forms and practices of broadcast communication. What follows, then, will be a small and by necessity rather sketchy intervention into a larger set of questions concerned with the dialectical relationship between technological and communicative potential and social and political change. It is from within this broader context that I propose to highlight some of the correspondences between promotional culture, public service, and propaganda in the broadcasting systems of the United States, Britain, and Germany in the early 1930s. By drawing comparisons between the programming and policy making of radio stations during a period of social and political crisis, I hope to indicate some of the

patterns of continuity and connection between broadcasting systems that have been widely described and understood as polar opposites serving very different political ends.¹

Moreover, while the various national histories have been increasingly well documented, it is surprising how fleeting the references to the Great Depression are in many of the standard histories of broadcasting, despite the wealth of detail that has been accumulated about the period, which so often is described as the dawn of a “golden age” of radio.² Part of what I want to do here, then, is to delineate the significance of this period for the development of radio broadcasting by extrapolating from existing histories as well as from my own research into the German radio of the period, but more especially, given that these histories of radio are almost always restricted to their respective national contexts, I hope to demonstrate that new insights and fresh perspectives on old questions can be offered by cross-national historical accounts.

Though there has been a welcome growth of interest in the study of radio in recent years, it is nevertheless true that the vast majority of studies are conducted within the various national contexts. This is understandable to the extent that there is a great deal of work still to be done even at the national level in this comparatively neglected corner of media studies, and the recent spate of detailed cultural and social histories that pay close attention to the diversity of audiences, local programming, or specific genres are finally putting flesh on the bare bones of the broad institutional overviews that have for so long dominated the field.³ Another reason may be that the histories mirror the common experience of broadcasting having developed as a deliberately national institution—indeed, there have been periods when states have attempted to prohibit or discourage their citizens from tuning in to foreign stations. Nevertheless, there would be good reason to engage in more comparative work that builds on these foundations, not least in respect of the formative period of broadcasting, when not only were the broadcasters casting an eye across at their international colleagues to see what lessons could be learned but also many listeners explored the span of the borderless frequency spectrum, helped, in Europe at least, by sets whose dials featured the names of faraway stations and magazines that regularly listed foreign schedules.⁴ Even the BBC, that most archetypal national institution, in 1927 adopted as its motto “Nation shall speak Peace unto Nation.”

Given that the various national systems did not develop entirely autonomously, there would seem to be a case for our histories to acknowledge this more explicitly. Moreover, it is likely that such a perspective might also set the various national histories in a different relief. In respect to the current study, for example, it is obvious that during this period all three states experienced profound economic and social upheaval, which demanded political as well as social and cultural responses. Without suggesting that the diversity and specificity of responses both within and across these three states are inconsequential, it is nev-

ertheless possible, at least as far as broadcasting is concerned, to discern a common appeal to reassuring conservative notions of national community that transcended the fissures between class, religious, or sectional interests. Seen from this perspective, the entrenchment during this period of three apparently distinct broadcasting policies can be seen to have a common ancestry and exhibit a greater number of common features than might otherwise be recognized. Moreover, it becomes clearer that these policies were developed not in a national vacuum but in *self-conscious* distinction from each other, the one fearful or fascinated, by turns, of the elitism, populism, or authoritarianism of the other.

To begin I shall set out some of the reasons for turning to this period of the late 1920s to the mid-1930s as a key transitional moment in the history of broadcasting.

Production of Needs in a Time of Scarcity

In economic terms, the Depression has been identified as the birth of our present social formation (Baudrillard 144; Fox 103), in which Western economies underwent a critical transition from the politics of production to the politics of consumption. As Marx had predicted, capitalism in crisis pursued the revival of the economy through the expansion of secondary production. By 1929 the key challenge facing the capitalist economy was not so much one of production as one of distribution and circulation.⁵ As far as a history of broadcasting is concerned, this period is pivotal in providing a spur to the production of radio both as consumer good and as one of the vehicles available for the production of *needs*, both in the form of explicit advertisements for consumer goods and, more generally—even in the anticommercial programming of the BBC—by contributing to the familiarization of a leisure- and commodity-oriented way of life.⁶

This is one of the great paradoxes of the Depression era which makes it such an interesting period for historians of the media to investigate: the way in which the iconography of scarcity that haunts the popular memory of the Depression rubs up against the contemporaneous ideology of a “culture of abundance” or the distribution of “cheap luxuries.” The economic historian might want to question the persuasiveness of such a clear-cut periodization, but as a historian of thirties America, Warren Susman puts it,

it is not a question of whether such abundance was a real possibility. The significant issue is the belief that it was. Franklin Roosevelt’s speeches during the worst Depression times argued for a world of abundance; only some technical difficulties with distribution somehow kept the American people from their rightful share in that abundance. I submit that a whole culture was built on this vision . . . everywhere there was a new emphasis on buying, spending, and consuming. Advertising became not only a new economic force essential

in the regulation of prices but also a vision of the way the culture worked: the products of the culture became advertisements of the culture itself. (xxiv)

In a discursive history, it is precisely these perceptions and mythologies and the ways in which they served to define cultural production and the practice of politics that do take center stage. In this sense, as Baudrillard argued, the strategy of consumption, which was thrown up in the wake of the crisis of 1929, created the simulation, or illusion, of symbolic participation. It is clearly important to consider radio's location in such a strategy as a medium offering at least the potential for, or perhaps the appearance of, symbolic participation in the political process and the cultural life of the nation while at the same time—in varying degrees according to national context—itsself representing both a consumer good and a good means for producing consumers. While this strategy may have been most explicitly and sharply defined in the commercial broadcasting environment in the United States, it is nevertheless possible to discern parallel, albeit differently inflected, developments promoting the illusion of symbolic participation and the production of needs in the European context.⁷

A Period of Consolidation

Inasmuch as it was caught up in this paradox, radio during this period can be seen to be at something of a crossroads. We see a shift from the “radio craze” of the 1920s to broadcasting's becoming more established technologically, institutionally, and artistically. In less than a decade, buoyed up by a degree of economic stability and a faith in technological progress, radio had come to rival film as a dominant cultural form in both America and Europe. With the onset of the economic crisis, however, radio's continued success was not necessarily assured—commentators were for some time preoccupied with the question of whether it represented a superfluous luxury or an indispensable conveyor of both information and diversionary entertainment.

As it turned out, because it offered a relatively cheap means of information and entertainment, radio thrived during this period. The number of radio sets in the United States doubled between 1929 and 1933 (Douglas 128). In Germany too the number of licenses almost doubled over the same period (from 2.6 million to 4.3 million: Fischer 14–37), and there was a similar increase in Great Britain, with the greatest year-to-year increase during the height of the Depression, from March 1930 to March 1931 (Briggs 253). New models were brought out (one of which in America was not insignificantly called the “prosperity model”), including the first all-electric, mains-powered streamlined sets with one-knob tuning, often constructed to complement domestic furnishings, that mark the decisive shift away from the technical contraptions of the early

hobbyists and, as William Boddy has argued, mark the gendered shift from a masculinist listening activity, characterized by “isolation and intensity, the fabrication of the technical apparatus itself . . . and an interactive role as broadcaster” to the “emerging . . . industry’s construction of the radio listener as distracted housewife” (Boddy 113).⁸ It is also during the Depression years that Boddy locates the final emasculation of broadcasting, a time marked more generally as a crisis for masculinity, with so many millions of unemployed men ejected from the public sphere of the workplace into the private and feminizing sphere of the home.⁹ (Incidentally, in recognizing this narrative of emasculation in the history of broadcasting, Boddy suggests, we will find insights into the late-twentieth-century hyperbolic celebration of “interactivity” surrounding the eager adoption of new media technologies by a new generation of mainly male enthusiasts.)

Indeed, in America, as elsewhere, corporate radio and the electrical manufacturing sector as a whole remained buoyant throughout the Depression, while other businesses collapsed (Barnouw 244; Pegg 151). With the exception of cinema, many more traditional public forms of entertainment found they were losing audiences, and certainly in the States the radio was quick to exploit the influx of talent from depressed sectors such as vaudeville (Czitrom 80). Indeed, the phonograph industry had very nearly collapsed, as people’s decision to turn to radio as a cheaper source of musical entertainment coincided with a period (which lasted until the late 1930s) when, pushed by government legislation, the networks showcased live music at the cost of recorded sounds (Douglas 227). While the BBC strove to keep recorded music to strictly limited hours, in Germany there was a veritable showdown between the record companies and the radio stations for several months in 1931 over the proportion of recorded music on the airwaves (Leonhard 414–15). Throughout the entertainment industry, from the music business to publishing and the cinema, the Depression necessitated a restructuring toward merger and monopolization on both sides of the Atlantic, with all the concomitant trends toward standardization and homogenization (Chanan 86–7).

It is during this period that the national networks were stabilized in the States following an unusually intense and polarized debate about the structure and regulation of an already established industry (McChesney 4). Although American broadcasting had uniquely followed a commercial rationale since its inception, the question of the extent of freedoms allowed to corporate interests was a hotly contested one in the early years of the Depression, running up to the creation of the Federal Communications Commission in 1934. Certainly, although advertising (predominantly at the local level) had been a feature of American broadcasting since the early 1920s, it was in the period following the Wall Street crash that the relationship between the two industries became more deeply entrenched. From 1931 onward in particular, with smaller companies hardest hit by the economic crisis and therefore less able to afford to buy airtime, there

was a shift toward larger corporations and the newly influential agencies, with their brasher and more direct appeals to consumers, getting involved in program production on national networks (Smulyan 118). It was in this climate that the once lively sector of noncommercial stations in the United States also largely collapsed, having already been dealt a body blow by the 1927 Radio Act (McChesney 254). There were grave consequences for the nascent broadcast reform movement, which had sought to transform the capitalist domination of the airwaves, as the financial and institutional base from which it could have launched its campaign was badly undermined. At the same time, suggestions that the government should intervene in an industry that was already thriving fell on stony ground in the early years of the Depression, and by the time the New Deal had legitimized greater intervention in the economy, the commercial monopoly of the airwaves was legislatively assured.

Meanwhile in Germany, there were also moves toward more centralization than had been the case thus far, but the most pressing debates of the period were about the thawing of the prohibition on political content. When broadcasting had begun in Germany late in 1923, it was in the wake of tremendous political and economic instability and a compromise system had been established that provided for the public transmission of “nonpolitical” privately produced programs from regional stations.¹⁰ Though there had been repeated calls to allow politics onto the air in the latter part of the decade, it was not until 1929 that regular programs with a party-political content were included in the schedules, in a process by which the doctrine of nonpolitical radio was ostensibly being supplanted by a doctrine of party-political balance. The increasingly fragmented political climate was exacerbated by the transition to government by emergency legislation in March 1930. By the summer of 1931 the government had begun using the radio to publicize these emergency decrees, and the *Reichskanzler* increasingly took to the microphone during the crisis (Pohle; Bausch; Lacey, *Feminine*. 48–49). By 1932, as the economic crisis was giving succor to ever more extremist politics, wide-ranging radio reforms were introduced, completing the process of nationalization with the withdrawal of private capital from all radio concerns and distorting the process of politicization by ascribing new powers to the central state radio authority to pursue the interests of the state via both the newly dubbed *Deutschlandsender* and the nine regional stations. The propaganda model was therefore largely in place by the time the Nazis came to power.

In Britain the BBC had enjoyed a national public monopoly since receiving its royal charter in 1927.¹¹ Though the late twenties did see the development of regional BBC stations (and the concomitant designation of the existing service from London as the “National” program), a policy of institutional centralization characterized the period, symbolized by the move in 1932 to the imposing premises of the purpose-built Broadcasting House. Certainly it was during this period that the BBC consolidated its image as a great British institution and defined

itself in opposition not only very often to the prevailing mood in the country but explicitly also to trends in the broadcasting systems of America and Germany.

Beyond technological and institutional consolidation, this is also the period in which some of the archetypal broadcast forms became established. Whereas music and discussion had dominated the airwaves during the 1920s, the thirties were the heyday of new comedy and variety shows, whose function, as much as anything, was to offer diversion from the travails of the time, sometimes by finding a dark humor in the situation as much as by offering simple escapism.¹² In America, comedians, often stars from vaudeville such as Eddie Cantor, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Jack Benny, and Ed Wynn, dominated the networks, developing new nonvaudeville formats in the process (Best 65–67). It was also the great era of the serial drama and the soap, whose continual narrative strategy of crisis and recovery fitted the times so neatly (Susman 160). In addition, this period saw the beginnings of moderated discussion programs (see below) and, in Germany, the direct intervention of the state into scheduling strategy.

Comparative broadcasting history highlights the ways in which national debates and programming policies were at the time quite consciously shaped by reference to parallel developments in other countries. (In Britain the specter of Americanization haunted the minds of many involved in shaping the output of the BBC (and the BBC model, which was often vaunted as a viable alternative model by the broadcast reform movement in the States, of course). In order to avoid what was seen as the vulgarizing effects of American popular culture, the BBC constructed a whole new kind of middlebrow culture that was in no danger of offending any of its listeners (Frith 40–42).¹³ Variety, or “Light Entertainment” in the vernacular of the BBC, set out to appeal to the “ordinary listener” regardless of age, gender, class, or region (a policy that drew on a domesticated, feminized image of a public deserving protection from the intrusion of anything inappropriate into the home). Despite public assertions of resisting the draw of America throughout this period, there were nevertheless programming innovations imported from the States, although they were invariably given a peculiarly British twist (Camporesi 625–39).¹⁴ Germany’s relationship to America in this period, both before and after 1933, was similarly ambivalent, born of a fascination with the possibility of consumerism bringing together terms that in the European context remained contradictory—“the individual” and “the mass,” for example, or “objectivity” and “utopia” (Rosenhaft 123). In America, on the other hand, the specter of fascism was at least as much a cause for concern among progressives as was the defeat of capitalism by socialism (Swing; Pandora 16–17), and the similarities between commercial and political propaganda were not lost on contemporary commentators.¹⁵

Finally, it is important to note that this period also saw the professionalization of audience research and ratings systems, though in Britain the BBC held out longer against this trend under the guidance of John Reith, bolstered by the

fact that the main available models for audience research were either the American system, tainted by its commercial motivations, or the German techniques developed to support propagandistic aims. Both systems were, however, closely monitored from 1930 onward (Pegg 109). The Crossley phone surveys of listeners' habits were introduced in America in 1929; Lazarsfeld began his pioneering work in 1933 (Douglas 125), with the Hooper ratings system being introduced just a few years later, succeeded in the late 1940s by the Nielsen ratings (Douglas 158). Gradually during the 1930s the same techniques of market research began to be applied in the field of politics for the first time, foremost among which in the States was the Gallup poll, although there was also a range of independent intelligence bureaus set up by government agencies (Best 58–59). Though the main motivation behind the development of such listener surveys was the growth of commercial broadcasting in the United States (which, in the absence of traditional circulation figures, needed some way of reassuring advertisers about what kind of audience was out there to listen to their messages), it is also part of a more general attempt during a period of intense cultural anxiety and social division to anchor a sense of (national) identity in the reassuring bedrock of statistical information (Susman 212). Even the BBC, with its famous patrician disdain for pandering to popular taste, had been gradually succumbing to pressures (primarily from its own programming departments, especially Education) to accommodate audience demands starting in the early 1930s, particularly from 1934 onward (Briggs 258; Scannell and Cardiff 18). It also did allow, on occasion, audience participation in social surveying, for example in a seven-part series of talks called *Changes in Family Life*, broadcast in the spring of 1932 by the social reformer W. H. Beveridge (Pegg 99, 149). By 1936, however reluctantly, the BBC finally set up its Listener Research Unit to help identify its audience and, less enthusiastically, to assist in the planning and targeting of programs (it did not really come into its own until the Second World War). It is also in this period that audience research began in earnest in Germany, especially after 1933, with the development of a whole array of techniques designed to better target the political propaganda and discipline the listening population from secret service reports to listening wardens checking on their neighbors' listening (Bramsted 75; Bessler).

It is here, in the wider responses to the cultural anxieties thrown up by the Great Depression, that I think we can see the connections between the various models and principles of broadcasting.

Cultural Anxieties

To a large extent, the cultural anxiety most consistently and loudly expressed on the part of the political and economic elites was the perceived threat to a stable sense of national and cultural identity. Although the ravages of the Depression

reached far and wide throughout society, there was nevertheless a fear that new social divides would open up or exacerbate existing ones.¹⁶ In various ways, and to various political ends, radio was seized upon as a tool that could bind the various constituents of the nation together, wherever they were and whatever their circumstances. The radio was, for example, more than many other cultural forms, available to those still working and the unemployed alike.¹⁷ In America, where the wider effects of the Wall Street crash were first felt, the head of the commercial network NBC declared in 1930 that the radio presented an ideal way

to preserve our now vast population from disintegrating into classes. . . . We must know and honor the same heroes, love the same songs, enjoy the same sports, and realize our common interest in our national problems.¹⁸

The role for popular, commercialized culture is striking in this formulation, which demonstrates faith in the possibility of social cohesion to be achieved and sustained by sharing in the same imaginary. Warren Susman notes the new rhetorical flourish in many a public statement of the time, in which the speaker invokes the name of the people (Susman 212), though in a period when it was estimated that twenty million Americans could be tuned in to the same program at the same time, regardless of class, regional, or racial differences (Cantril and Allport 3), such claims carried more than just rhetorical force.¹⁹

A similar refusal of difference marked the kinds of public statements that were aired on the BBC at the height of the Great Depression, for example the following statement taken from a radio lecture broadcast in 1932:

There is not a special class or kind of people who constitute the unemployed. They come from almost every calling and have as great a variety of interests and capacities as any other member of the community. There are ordinary decent people like ourselves to whom an extraordinary misfortune has happened.²⁰

There were occasional instances when unemployed men were invited to speak directly about their experiences, such as the 1932 series *Men Talking* and *Time to Spare*, though this was the exception rather than the rule in a schedule dominated by the professional middle classes. But these programs did represent, in part, a continuation of the prevailing trend to construct a sense of shared participation in national life by papering over the profound social and class divisions in Britain and ignoring the radicalization of politics which accompanied the current social and economic dislocation.²¹ Indeed, the ideology of objectivity and neutrality within the BBC, initially strengthened in the aftermath of the controversial coverage of the 1926 general strike, was given further impetus during the Depression, when, as Anthony Smith points out, "the accusation of cyn-

ical manipulation of the masses became itself part of the ammunition of the class war" (29). There was a move away from the early concept of public service, with its emphasis on providing access to the political process, to a concern with "integration." A policy was adopted that avoided political controversy (defined in such a way as to find controversy at almost every turn) yet endeavored to "provide a stable framework of knowledge and an enduring sense of the moral order" (Cardiff and Scannell 159). Above all, there was a drive to embed a revived sense of national identity through a calendar of "sacred" national events, from folk festivals to sporting events, but headed by the great royal ceremonies (Cardiff and Scannell 159–161).

In Germany, public broadcasting had been introduced at the height of another economic crisis with profound social consequences, the Great Inflation of 1923. The minister in charge, Hans Bredow, had fostered a policy of keeping the airwaves entirely free of political content on the grounds of best serving the public interest:

[A]t a time when one did not know if today's wages would pay for tomorrow, when battles between political parties were tearing the land asunder, when the audience's intolerance of politics had reached its limit and the Reich was faltering under internal and external pressure, the nation wanted to hear no more about politics and party quarrelling. (Bredow 290)

By the end of the decade—the whole period having been marked by extreme political fragmentation—the persistent calls for politicization of the airwaves were beginning to make some impact on the schedules, but with the onset of the Depression (an economic crisis characterized this time by deflation), once again we find that the dominant discourses were calling on the broadcasters to speak to the nation as one people. An article by a government representative in the radio magazine *Die Sendung* in 1930 struck a familiar chord:

One of radio's most admirable functions is its ability to bring the different classes together. The nation (*Volk*) is torn apart by ideology and party politics. . . . In this situation only radio can help. Radio alone is nonpartisan. (Gosler 122)

The guidelines for the newly nationalized and centralized radio system in 1932 were couched in overtly nationalist language, demanding that "it is the task of all stations to cultivate the collectivity and the entirety of the community of the German people" (Fischer 89). When the Nazis came to power less than six months later, they found a system of radio almost perfectly suited to their needs, as Joseph Goebbels made plain in 1933: "radio is the most modern and most important instrument to influence the masses, a true servant of the *Volk*, working to unite the German people in a common vision" (qtd. in Diller 109).

Having made the mistake at first of treating the microphone as a public platform for endless speeches and blunt propaganda, causing thousands of listeners to tune out, the broadcast propaganda was gradually “domesticated,” attuned more carefully to the primarily private conditions of its reception. An exception was made for the Führer’s speeches, for, unlike Roosevelt, Hitler was never an effective studio performer and so, with newly developed techniques for recording his public speeches, these party events were broadcast under the rubric *Stunde der Nation* (Hour of the nation), when everyone from housewives to factory workers was expected to put down their tools and listen with rapt attention (Zeman 48–49; Rodt 924–25). These improved outside broadcast techniques also enabled “ordinary,” albeit strictly vetted, voices onto the air under mottoes such as “*Mit dem Mikrophon hinein ins Volk!*” (Take the microphone to the people). In these ways the Nazis were able to use the nationwide broadcasting system to transcend regional and social barriers for the propagation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, a national community sharing a common destiny based on the criterion of race.

Now, I am not claiming that there are not significant differences in the political motivations and contexts of these various statements and the broadcasting systems they stand for, but I think the similarities between them—the desire to speak beyond class, religious, or sectional loyalties and to replace such loyalties with a new awareness of a popular or national or *völkisch* community—are telling, and indicative of the way in which social crises tend to engender conservative philosophies of security and a nostalgic concern for community.

In America, as Stephen Recken has demonstrated, the need to fit in and belong was a dominant theme in the mass media during the Great Depression (205). The widespread anxiety fed by economic uncertainty generated in turn a new definition of success that combined a desire for rootedness in familiar communities with a “gospel of leisure” at odds with the nineteenth-century emphasis on the work ethics of industry, frugality, and prudence. While the popular self-help publications of the period stressed the need for self-reliance, abstinence from the stressful distractions of modern urban life, and a return to a more “wholesome” community life, the nostalgic drive was at the same time met still more forcefully by the turn to consumerism that was animated by the cajoling tones of the box in the corner. The radio was employed in the production of compensatory desires, which, as Daniel Czitrom has argued, attempted to relocate cultural forms from the public to the private, from the past to the present:

The ideology of consumption reiterated a basic message that what one had was never enough. It created a need for products largely through an appeal to a mythical past—lost community, lost intimacy, lost self-assurance. Consumer goods promised to make one happy by returning what had vanished. Commercial broadcasting wedded the adver-

tiser's message to older popular cultural forms made historically specific for the new home environment of radio. (88)

In Britain too nostalgia infused great tracts of the schedules with the relentless striving to reinvent and cultivate the national heritage, as it permeated the political rhetoric of both right and left throughout the period (Scannell and Cardiff 289–90). In Germany the succession of crises that plagued the country following defeat in the First World War were habitually translated nostalgically into crises of morality, where images of home and family represented a safe haven from the instabilities characterizing public life (Lacey, "Driving"). These sentiments were formally institutionalized in the 1932 guidelines for German radio, which pronounced, "The admirable strengths and goods inherited from past generations of Germans and the German Reich are to be respected and increased in the work of the German radio" (Fischer 89).

Radio served this nostalgic drive not only in content but also in form. Indeed, it was broadcasting's capability of inducing "a far more intense feeling of membership" (Cantril and Allport 260) than other media that was at the heart of the intense debates surrounding it in the heightened tensions of the Depression era. This nostalgia for a mythical communal past, which could draw a veil over the tensions and divisions of the current crisis, gave rise in each of the broadcasting systems to policies that tended to deny the radicalization of politics that characterized the period. This is to say not that the policies pursued were not intensely political in their intent or in their effect, but that the airwaves did not function fully as a sphere of public debate reflecting the spectrum of opinion on the crisis and its remedies. The airwaves were by no means devoid of references to the crisis, but comment for the most part was confined to representations of the social crisis rather than political debate.²²

In Germany, for example, the regional stations responded to the crisis in a variety of ways, from lectures on economics (e.g., Leipzig's 1930 series *Tagesfragen der Wirtschaft* [Economic issues of the day]) to interviews with workers (e.g. Frankfurt's 1929 program *Wo uns der Schuh dr Ückt* [Where our shoes are pressing]), and the "first workers' radio play," *Toter Mann* (Dead man), broadcast from Cologne in 1931 (Schumacher 569–79). However, against a background of immense political fragility, especially in the crisis summer of 1931, any such programs were subjected to strict censorship prior to their transmission, and in some cases contributors to discussions were not introduced by name, lest their interventions be ascribed to a particular party political position (Schumacher 580–81, 594–95). A contemporary critic wrote that "the position of politics on the radio has become more obscure, more confused and more damaging in its effects than ever before" (Stiemer 67).

One of the most significant developments of the period, certainly in Europe, was the development of the discussion program, where a variety of

opinions could be represented, mediated by a neutral or “objective” presenter, allowing issues of the day to be aired without falling prey to accusations of bias or politicization, although by 1932 state intervention in broadcasting in Germany was becoming more prevalent despite attempts by the stations to resist such a trend (Scannell and Cardiff 153–78; Schumacher 596–97, 617). Again, the motivations are different, but the language is very much the same in the American context, where the sidelining of politics is couched in terms of not wanting to offend or alienate potential listeners within the national audience. It was assumed that no commercial station in the States could afford to alienate any part of the public, as its profits depended upon showing a favorable response from as large an audience as possible, and station policies were often couched in terms of not undermining “public confidence” (Czitrom 82). The radio journalist and critic H. V. Kaltenborn wrote that:

the radio has been extremely timid about permitting the broadcasting of anything that contravenes the established order. Its influence has gone towards stabilization rather than change. The best broadcasting stations everywhere are owned by large corporations whose dependence on the good-will of the public authorities and the public at large makes them extremely unwilling to risk giving offense. (Qtd. in Czitrom 82)

This conception of the intrusion of public life into the home, especially when the home is constructed as a sanctuary from the pressures and hardships engendered by the Depression, also figured large in the discourses of the late Weimar Republic, as I have argued at length elsewhere. In a world that still defined the political as masculine, the audience that needed protection from politics and other likely sources of offense was feminized in a retreat to the private realm of home and family as part of a process that granted entry into a mythical community founded on national rather than partisan ties. In depriving radio of its political potential as a mediator of a plurality of opinion, the broadcasters were admitting the victory of political intolerance and, fatefully, in Germany surely weakened the democratic defense against the antidemocratic movement that came to power in 1933.

Political Transition

In the various broadcasting traditions, therefore, it can be demonstrated that in different ways the response to the cultural anxieties generated by the Depression was profoundly conservative despite the increasingly radicalized climate and the variety of intellectual, artistic, and political reactions to the crisis. These various responses, though driven by a shared crisis and often similar in their nostalgic recourse to the ideal of a national community, nevertheless

resulted in the deeper entrenchment of three different systems in the service of, respectively, the market, the public, and the state. Furthermore, in all three countries, for various reasons, there developed a new interest in the audience and in the sophistication of persuasive techniques.

Of course, there are analogies to be made between the techniques of commercial promotional culture and those of the political propagandist, some of which I have already alluded to and which have been widely recognized and repeatedly debated from the 1920s on, but I do not intend to say much more about that at this juncture.²³ Instead, I want to turn to the points of contact between public service broadcasting and the propaganda machine of the Third Reich. Again, the point is not to relativize away the differences, which would be indefensible, but to suggest that by identifying precisely at what points the systems diverge, we might come to a better understanding of the potentials and limits of broadcasting for political practice and to understand something of the role of the media in the process of political transition.

The case for the democratizing potential of public service broadcasting has often been made, but rarely so persuasively as in Paddy Scannell's influential 1989 essay "Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Public Life." Examining the history of public service broadcasting in Great Britain, Scannell sees broadcasting "as a public good that has unobtrusively contributed to the democratization of everyday life, in public and private contexts, from its beginning through to today" (136). The key democratizing characteristics that Scannell identified included the provision of mixed programs on nationwide channels available to all, which reinvented a sense of national community and generated a "shared public life of quite a new kind" (138); second, a whole range of once exclusive or restricted events was made available to a wider and more varied public than ever before; third, private life was resocialized and represented private persons in the public domain, creating "new communicative entitlements for excluded social groups" (142); fourth, broadcasting undermined the aura of presence associated with more conventional modes of communication; and finally, public service broadcasting helped to bring about a real change in the communicative ethos of society by familiarizing performed forms of talk and helping to make performed talk generally more relaxed and spontaneous.

While many of these characteristics could also be identified in the commercial radio of thirties America, what is striking from the perspective of German radio is how most of the conditions that are proposed as democratizing prefigure and continue to inform the broadcasting practices of the Nazis' propagandistic, totalitarian regime. The description of a service of mixed programs on nationwide channels, reinventing a sense of national community and generating a "shared public life of quite a new kind," could serve almost equally well as a description of Nazi radio. Similarly, the generalized access to public events, the socialization of the private sphere, the domestication of modes of address, and

the provision of a common resource for social interaction were all features of broadcasting in the Third Reich.²⁴

Although these formal continuities are significant, what this comparison underlines is the need to follow Scannell's example of a critical perspective that situates broadcasting forms in a broad social, political, and economic context. The transition to a totalitarian regime obviously has consequences for broadcasting that cannot be overlooked in the translation of Scannell's model to the German case of this period. During the Third Reich the reinvention of a sense of national community was one that was racially exclusive; access was opened up only to public events organized or sanctioned by the Nazi Party; private life continued to be resocialized, but across a much narrower social spectrum; any critical space opened up by the destruction of aura was rendered barren in a context where response and social interaction were forcefully curtailed and the potentially empowering domesticated forms of address were calculated to promote a pernicious ideology.

Nevertheless, I would still want to claim that the identification of formal continuities between the democratizing form of public service broadcasting and its apparent opposite in the propaganda model is significant, because there are several questions that could follow. Either the contribution of these aspects of broadcasting to democratization is overstated (Adorno and Horkheimer [109] famously regarded the telephone as a more democratic—because interactive—medium than authoritarian, unidirectional radio) or, more interestingly, broadcasting continued in some way to provide a democratizing impulse within a profoundly antidemocratic regime. One possibility is that it provided access in principle, even if in a strictly controlled and maliciously exclusive way, to information about and participation in political life. In other words, it kept alive the pretense and therefore, perhaps, the hope for an acceptance of the right of the people to be part of the political process, and in adopting a colloquial and domesticated mode of address, it sustained at some level a recognition that the mode of political communication should accommodate itself to the requirements of the people. Moreover, despite the fact that the regime enjoyed total control of the broadcasting output and could be brutal in controlling its reception, there remained, nevertheless, spaces for resistance.

In short, a comparative approach offers ways of thinking afresh about the questions of continuity and change in Germany before and after 1933 and of the constraints on even the most powerful system of propaganda. This is by no means to suggest a straightforward equivalence between public service or commercial broadcasting and Nazified radio, nor is it necessarily to privilege form over content, but it does demonstrate the importance of examining the broader social, political, and economic context of any media history and in this case might suggest that an understanding of the democratizing potential of broadcasting goes some way toward explaining some of the disjunctures between Nazi

ideology, cultural practice, and the limited effectiveness of broadcast propaganda. By the same token, I hope that at the very least it illustrates the value of looking across national boundaries in the analysis of radio history: it reminds us about the interdependency of social and media transformations and the very limited sense in which the media can act as a causal mechanism in the process of social and political transition.

Conclusion

Insofar as I have been identifying similar discursive strategies on the part of broadcasters to deal with the onslaught of crisis, and insofar as I have suggested that the conservative and nationalist reforms of the radio system in Weimar Germany left the Nazis little to do in order to turn the radio system into an efficient vehicle for their propaganda, it might seem that I am suggesting that the broadcasting services of Britain and the States would also have been ripe for appropriation by extremist governments had history played out differently. But even if that were a question worth pursuing, the evidence that I have been presenting in this exploratory way would hardly substantiate such a claim. No, my conclusion here is a simpler one, namely, that there are still lessons to be learned from engaging in comparative radio histories. Of the radio histories that we have, however insightful and thought-provoking, the vast majority are national histories, and so the policy and programming decisions and the discourses within which they operate are often taken to be uniquely telling to those particular national contexts. This becomes perhaps especially clear in thinking about the radio of the Weimar Republic, where it is almost impossible not to read the conservative and nationalist statements as staging posts on the inevitable road to Nazi propaganda. By recognizing the similar strategies employed in other national contexts in response to the pressures of the global economic depression, it focuses our attention on the greater complexities and specificities of historical narratives that might at first elude us. This should be not about relativizing or leveling out differences between national contexts, but rather an impetus precisely to concentrate on difference.

Notes

1. Briggs, for example, notes, "These three broadcasting systems were diverging—not converging—during the 1930s" (9). While I would certainly not want to flatten out the very significant differences between the three systems, I would argue that these differences have blinded us to the equally significant similarities.

2. Simply checking through contents pages and indexes of what might be considered the "standard" histories (Barnouw for the United States, Briggs for the United Kingdom, and Bausch and Diller for Germany, for example) indicates that the Depression does not figure large in their analytical or descriptive frameworks. More recent social and cultural histories are more sensitive to this broader context, particularly in relation to specific programming

histories (e.g., Hilmes and Douglas for the United States, Scannell and Cardiff for the United Kingdom, and Leonhard for Germany), although it is rare even here for the crisis to be one of the central categories of analysis.

3. This volume is itself a good indication of the current renaissance in radio studies. Another indicator is the recent establishment in the United Kingdom of the Radio Studies Network.

4. By 1933 there were at least 235 radio stations in Europe (Arnheim 236). For a vivid picture of the ease with which Europeans traversed the international airwaves, see Arnheim's introduction to his famous book on radio (13–14).

5. Clearly such a schematic formulation rides roughshod over the complexities of the development of these modern capitalist economies from the late nineteenth century onward. The transition was not as absolute nor as abrupt as in Baudrillard's overly pessimistic polemic, nor were the consequences so devastatingly negative for the masses with their entry into the market as consumers as Baudrillard and other critics would suppose. Nevertheless, the formulation does highlight the paradoxical moment that the Depression represents for cultural historians, with its apparent contradiction of an ideology and iconography of consumption becoming prominent in such hard times (Barnard 17–23).

6. While there is a case for arguing that radio, with its broad reach and interpenetration of the public and private spheres, was a particularly significant actor in this regard, it was, of course, only one of the institutions of this new consumerist culture that were consolidated in this period.

7. The impact of the stock market crash of October 1929 was not immediately felt in Europe, but beginning in 1930 the tremors from the crisis in the American economy served to exacerbate already existing economic problems. Germany, only recently having recovered from the great inflationary crisis of 1923, was facing impending bankruptcy initially unrelated to what was happening on Wall Street, while the British economy had been characterized by a permanent crisis throughout the 1920s (Rothermund 59–73).

8. This was not only an American phenomenon—see Moores for an account of British developments and Lenk (110–14) for a German comparison.

9. Susan J. Douglas has argued that the popular radio comedies of the era, with their verbal ingenuity, can be read in part as compensatory texts during this crisis of masculinity, allowing men “an imagined preserve where they could project their own sense of failure onto others . . . yet also hear that even benighted men, through their wits alone, were still going to land on top, if only for a few minutes” (123).

10. The first national station, the Deutsche Welle, went on the air in 1926.

11. The BBC did, from 1930 onward, face some competition for listeners from the commercially sponsored pirate stations operating from the Continent.

12. Susan J. Douglas has effectively demonstrated the ways in which the “linguistic slapstick” of comedies such as *Amos 'n' Andy* reflected and channeled the negotiations around power and identity (not least around race and gender) that prevailed in Depression America (100–23). See also Hilmes's analysis of the construction of national narratives in this same seminal series (75–96).

13. Though there is not space here to elaborate further, it is also during this period, of course, that we see the consolidation of what Huyssen has called the “Great Divide,” namely, the cultural and critical contestation of modernism and mass culture.

14. When the BBC broadcast an episode of *Amos 'n' Andy* on New Year's Eve 1930, the *Radio Times* published the following quaint rider: “We announce this in advance because a broadcast by Amos 'n' Andy is something of an event. These pretended negroes, who broadcast daily in the interest of a powerful toothpaste corporation, are the single most popular item in the American programmes. . . . To hear Amos 'n' Andy . . . will be to take a step nearer to solving the great riddle of those United States” (5 Dec. 1930).

15. E.g., “when a formidable Fascist movement develops in America, the ad-men will be right up in front; [and] the American versions of Minister of Propaganda and

Enlightenment Goebbels (the man whom wry-lipped Germans have christened 'Wotan's Mickey Mouse') will be both numerous and powerful" (Rorty 394, qtd. in Pandora 21).

16. Richard Pells has argued that it is this "sense of decomposition at every level of public and private life" that distinguished the Depression from other economic crises that had gone before (111).

17. In Germany, the 2-marks-a-month license fee could be waived for the long-term unemployed from 1931, which helped to offset the potential for listening to fall in the early days of the crisis and was intended to divert any potential alienation from the mainstream (Lenk 125; Führer 90–94). Several of the regional radio stations instituted special programs for the unemployed, offering anything from retraining advice to psychological counseling, civic education (with a view to fighting radicalism) to tips on how to kill time with DIY (Schumacher 416–17).

18. Merlyn Aylesworth, "Report of the President," *Reports on Advisory Council* (New York: NBC, 1930) (qtd. in Boddy 109).

19. Michele Hilmes has persuasively argued that the construction of the commercial stations' claim to be the "nation's voice" was so successful in becoming a hegemonic discourse that it has tended to obscure the tensions and contradictions at play in the field of radio.

20. From a radio lecture by the master of Balliol College, A. D. Lindsay, 1932 (qtd. in Scannell and Cardiff 59).

21. Significantly, it was at the height of the Depression that the BBC introduced its Empire Service, celebrated with the king's Christmas Day speech in 1932, serving to extend the sense of commonality and Britishness throughout the colonies. Germany had begun an international service in 1929, though the Nazis increased the power of its shortwave transmissions when they came to power in 1933. Their inclusion of propagandistic programs in English spurred Reith to press the government for more resources for international broadcasts (Briggs 389–90). Nineteen thirty-two was also the year when English-language commercial radio became available to British listeners, with the arrival of the first "pirate" station, Radio Normandie, followed closely by the immensely popular Radio Luxembourg. The BBC eventually had to acknowledge and accommodate the innovations of these upstart competitors.

22. Clearly, there were exceptions to this broad generalization; indeed, with the intervention of politics into ever more areas of life with the New Deal, for example, politics did begin to feature more prominently on America's airwaves in the middle of the decade, most notably in the shape of Roosevelt's "fireside chats" but also in the new brand of broadcast demagoguery that came in the form of figures such as Father Coughlin and Huey Long. In Germany, the Deutsche Welle ran a series of talks in late 1930 entitled *Im Kampf gegen die Krise* (Fighting the crisis), which brought businessmen and politicians to the microphone (Schumacher 577).

23. I have suggested in "Driving the Message Home" that a gendered analysis of Nazi propaganda and the transitional space between the public and the private spheres that broadcasting occupies shifts attention away from the immediate association with passionate demagoguery and mass spectacle of the Nuremberg rallies toward the banal, everyday propaganda techniques and the gray area where those techniques manifest similarities with less pernicious attempts at persuasion in contemporary promotional media cultures (203–5).

24. I have argued this at greater length in *Feminine Frequencies* (235–39).

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CHAPTER 3**CRITICAL RECEPTION****Public Intellectuals Decry Depression-era Radio, Mass Culture, and Modern America**

Bruce Lenthall

PEERING INTO THE FUTURE, Edward Bellamy in 1888 imagined technology that would allow people all over the country to hear the finest music and lectures in their own homes. Simply by touching a knob or two, Bellamy prophesied in his novel *Looking Backward*, anyone would be able to listen to live performances any time of day. As the writer and social reformer depicted this hypothetical broadcasting system, it satisfied the desires of refined and educated Americans, offering programs to suit the most rarified tastes. In Bellamy's mind, the idea that would become radio decades later was one that America's intellectuals would applaud (59–62, 151–52).¹

Bellamy, the aspiring prophet, was wrong. In the 1930s, as a modern broadcasting system took hold in the United States, most American listeners relished radio; many saw exciting potential in the new medium. But America's public intellectuals—those thinkers who sought to reach an audience that was both broad and well educated—generally took a critical view of broadcasting. To this group, radio embodied the worst traits they saw in the emerging world of the twentieth century. Public intellectuals understood radio in terms of the forces transforming their culture in this period. They saw America becoming a frightening mass society—homogenized and centralized with little regard for individuals. They blamed, in part, radio and the commercial mass culture it represented for that shift. In other words, many public intellectuals recognized a critical swing in the nature of American culture by the 1930s, a swing that they worried would limit personal distinction and autonomy. Such fears of the mod-

ern world informed these thinker's critiques of radio. And although those critiques never swayed the populace at large, in holding radio partially responsible for the new order, public intellectuals in the Depression decade noted important connections between the mass media and a mass society—and the challenges facing individuals living with both.

To these critics, radio was a fundamental part of the tremendous change they saw around them. Their attacks on radio, then, reflected their discomforts with the world the medium had helped build. Particularly, they emphasized two distinct critiques of mass society: one culturally based, one based on power. They feared the dissemination of a uniform mass culture with its homogenizing influences. They feared the concentration of social power in the hands of the few who controlled the centralized medium. Some public intellectuals, most notably economist William Orton, attacked radio as a source of mass culture that undercut elite cultural standards and eroded personal creativity and uniqueness. For these critics, radio fit into decades of industrial, technological, and social change, culminating in the Depression—change that threatened to melt individual excellence into a common sludge. Others, from what amounted to a more radical position, assailed radio for centralizing authority. Commentators such as journalist and poet James Rorty blamed the new broadcasting system for enhancing big business's power to control society at large. In the early decades of the century these thinkers feared that capitalism was overwhelming individual voices and democratic ideals; as a national medium run by a few business interests, radio pushed the United States further along its path toward the rule of concentrated capital. These two positions—the mass culture critique and the capitalist critique—overlapped frequently, and many intellectuals clung to pieces of both views. It was entirely possible to look at the mass society emerging from the turn of the century through the Depression and rue both the threats to personal distinction and the power of capital, as both devalued individuals. Not all Americans or even all commentators agreed, of course. But for the majority of public intellectuals in the 1930s, their criticisms of radio gave voice to their suspicions of modern America.

Although the majority of radio listeners never shared them, those suspicions had resonance. It was during the 1930s that modern broadcasting fully arrived in the United States and most Americans integrated the new medium into their daily lives. Simultaneously, it was during the 1930s that intellectuals developed evaluations of radio that would, in some form, influence critical approaches to broadcasting for decades to come. In finding a mass world to be the hallmark of their times, such thinkers raised vital questions about broadcasting. Indeed, in their concern with forces that centralized culture and power—forces that in so doing recognized people not as distinct but as parts of blocs, promoted a uniformity of expression, and limited individual voices—such thinkers raised vital questions about the twentieth century as well. Ironically, though, for all that the

mass culture critics and the capitalist critics set out to defend the individual, neither group actually focused on the populace in their critiques. The former set of thinkers began by looking at the programs on the air; the latter emphasized the structure of the broadcasting industry. Neither rooted their evaluations in the responses listeners had to radio. Perhaps that at-times-blatant, at-times-subtle antipopulist quality to both critiques helps explain why neither won over the majority of Americans either in the 1930s or since. And yet, even without dominating popular opinion, the thinkers who based their discussions of radio on their visions of America as a mass society laid out stands that not only dominated intellectual criticism of the media in the Depression but, in some fashion, remain current.

Certainly, in the Depression decade most culture commentators had plenty of criticism for America's fledgling broadcasting system. Writing for a general educated audience, critics with views mildly to both right and left of the political center of the day forcefully expressed their disdain for radio. "In its use of the new means of communication, the land of opportunity looks more like the land of lost opportunities," cultural conservative William Orton lamented caustically. Despite common assumptions, he wrote, advances in radio technique had not improved American civilization ("Level" 3-4). On the left, Marxist James Rorty blasted radio for falling so far short of its potential that it contributed to a hydra-headed assault on civilization itself. "Perhaps the scientific workers who developed and perfected the radio tube were . . . guileless as to motive," he wrote. "But in terms of social consequences, these playboys of the laboratories brought into the world hopes, apprehensions, marvels, and grotesqueries greater than they could have anticipated" ("Impending" 714, 720).

Few of America's public intellectuals believed radio alone faced such problems. "The ether is a mirror: this confusion of voices out of the air merely echoes our terrestrial confusion," Rorty liked to write ("Impending" 714; see also *Our Master's Voice* 267; *Order* 7). These critics of radio found American broadcasting so disturbing because they found modern America so disturbing. The decades around the turn of the century had given rise to a national industrial economy that concentrated authority at the same time it blanketed the country with a web of invisible financial threads and uniform mass-produced products. To many intellectuals, the Depression confirmed their growing sense that such far-reaching and intense changes had eroded the country's social and cultural foundations. In their assessment of the contemporary United States, *America in Midpassage*, historians Charles and Mary Beard suggested that the Depression revealed the deep flaws in "the American way" caused by decades of "centralization in capitalism" (920-291).² The flaws in radio and in the modern era were virtually one and the same, many public intellectuals argued. Radio, Orton, Rorty, and others agreed, exacerbated and embodied the tensions of the emerging mass society.

At times, though, Orton, Rorty, and the schools of thought they represented identified those tensions somewhat differently. They disagreed about the crucial goals for their society and about the potential of radio to help achieve them. Orton, Rorty, and other critics certainly saw radio as part of recent transformations that produced a mass world and subverted the best interests of America. They did not, however, always have exactly the same ideas about what those interests were.

William Orton and the Mass Culture Critique

Radio was a vehicle, perhaps the leading vehicle, of mass culture in the 1930s. For many public intellectuals, that prodded their criticism of the medium. They disliked and feared mass culture. The commercial nature of radio forced broadcasters to appeal to broad audiences. In doing so, this array of thinkers asserted, radio transformed diverse groups of humanity into a collective audience that denied the distinctive and had no use for creative or intellectual advance. These critics expressed concerns about the tendency of the rising mass society of the twentieth century to undermine older ideas of individualism and high culture. They saw around them a world in which industrial and commercial interests increasingly demanded a passive and mediocre conformity. Radio perpetuated that trend. Those who staked out this position tended to center their attacks upon the cultural form itself—the medium and its programs—rather than focusing on the broader, more systemic issues shaping the form. Radio's mass culture critics began by bemoaning the quality of what they could hear on the air. Most, however, moved beyond that. They recognized that radio's commercial nature made it a vehicle of mass culture—and because of this, they saw little hope for American broadcasting. By devaluing individuals, minority groups, and artistic culture, radio thwarted the cultural uplift that these thinkers saw as society's high purpose. Mass culture, they felt, could not educate; hardly rigorous, radio sought popularity and inspired passivity. The medium replaced thought with an ever-present drone. This critique of mass culture still endures; it still raises vital issues; and it is still tinged with elitism.

Clearly, this strain of analysis required an elite conception of culture; commentators who scoffed at the offerings of radio regarded a more traditional high culture as superior to popular offerings. It is not surprising, then, that this mass culture critique of radio tended to find voice in the day's more culturally conservative journals such as the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*. The 1930s produced a well-known flowering of writers and thinkers on the left, but for the most part those intellectuals found expression in publications with more pronounced leftward political leanings, such as the *New Republic* and *The Nation*.³ All of these journals—and most of their contributors—clustered around mainstream currents in American thought in the era. In a decade in which America tolerated

radical left-leaning thought and the center's credo of liberalism evolved from its comparatively conservative, classical meaning toward its more modern one, none of these journals championed conservative political stances. In terms of culture, however, the political liberals often took a more conservative view than those on the left. On the subject of radio these journals cannot be rigidly classified as either culturally conservative or politically progressive; writers readily expressed either point of view in either type of journal. In general, though, thinkers who leaned toward a mass culture critique of radio expressed mainstream liberal values rather than the more radical views of the left in the 1930s. And, again in general, those commentators gravitated to traditional defenses of high culture.

Of those commentators, the most prolific and articulate on the subject of radio and mass culture was William Orton. More fully than anyone else in the 1930s, this Smith College economist developed the reasoning behind the criticism of the mass quality of American broadcasting. Widely diverse critics, from the likes of Ring Lardner to historians Charles and Mary Beard, shared related views of radio, but none expressed the complexities of their common vision so thoroughly or cohesively. Born in England in 1889, Orton grew up immersed in high culture, giving public recitals on both piano and organ before he was twenty. After serving in World War I, he moved to the United States and Smith in 1922, where he taught and wrote until his death in 1952. In the 1930s Orton allied himself loosely with efforts by educators to reform radio: in addition to writing for a general audience, Orton occasionally addressed the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education, a moderate reform group. Never a political radical, Orton combined a concern for the individual with the acceptance of government planning to lay the foundation of his progressive, general-interest writings. According to Smith faculty remembering Orton when he died, his life and work were shaped by his belief in "the freedom of the human spirit in the true liberal tradition" ("William Aylott Orton"; Smith College News Office, "Biographical Information" and William Orton obituary; McChesney 52, 87). Certainly, as Orton evaluated American radio he revealed his commitment to an evolving, centrist liberal tradition.

For many in intellectual circles in the 1930s, their objections to radio began with an objection to the programs on the air; rarely have so many found the word *drivel* to be such an apt description. Writing in the leftist publication *Common Sense*, future historian Louis Filler found himself quoting journalist H. L. Mencken to express his frustration with the quality of radio broadcasts: "Here in America we get our radio entertainment for nothing; and that is exactly what it is worth" (12). In the early 1930s James Rorty echoed the sentiments of the pioneering radio scientist Lee DeForest: there was little reason to own a radio, as there was nothing worth hearing on the air (*Our Master's Voice* 266). On the other side of a political spectrum, *The New Yorker* assailed radio programs from its

self-conscious position as chronicler and conservator of high culture. In 1932 and 1933, *The New Yorker* published commentaries on radio by the writer Ring Lardner. In his column, "Over the Waves," Lardner lashed out at popular programs and performers from *Amos 'n' Andy* to crooner Bing Crosby ("Heavy" 30). Although Lardner admitted he enjoyed some programs, in general he believed radio programs represented a degeneracy of culture in America. Lardner saw himself trying to hold back a tide of new mores that had been rushing in over several decades. Radio was drowning in inferior and indecent programs, Lardner felt; consequently, the airwaves threatened to swamp traditional standards of quality and decorum. "I don't like indecency in song or story," he wrote, "and sex appeal employed for financial gain in this manner makes me madder than anything except fruit salad" ("Lyricists" 46).⁴

Despite the slap at fruit salad, Lardner's critique typically focused on the quality of radio's programs. Most public intellectuals, however, went beyond that sort of tony entertainment review and considered the reasons for and implications of that programming. The trouble with radio, they argued, was that it was run by corporations for purely commercial interests. Programming was controlled not by trustees looking out for the public's interests, Orton explained, but "by persons concerned solely with making money out of the public." Orton did not take a conspiratorial view of this commercial oligopoly of the air. When confronted with the complexity of twentieth-century America, Orton, like liberalism itself, had come to see a new need for centralized regulation. The United States had simply failed to plan, he said, and this therefore provided the opportunity for commercial domination. "That this is so," he continued, "was due not so much to anybody's considered decision as to the lack of foresight and the slipshod inefficiency characteristic of the control of corporate life in the United States" (*America* 246–47).

Yoking radio to the pursuit of corporate profits guaranteed listeners in the United States an inferior product, Orton maintained (*America* 254; "Memorandum"). Diverse commentators pointed out that commercial concerns demanded that broadcasters maximize their audiences. That meant, these critics asserted, creating unsophisticated programs that could appeal to even the lowest cultural tastes. Programming based on popularity, then, did not denote a victory for a democratic culture—as defenders of mass culture claimed—but the loss of culture altogether. Music critic B. H. Haggin complained that radio stations avoided playing classical music because they feared exceeding the limits of the general public. To increase listenership, he wrote, radio producers made sure safe, simple musical forms dominated the air (268). Haggin was hardly alone: the *New Republic*, for instance, expanded his critique to include the breadth of radio programs, and several years later popularly known historians Charles and Mary Beard leveled the same charge ("For Better Broadcasting" 201; Beard and Beard, 644). In the name of profits, many thinkers agreed,

broadcasters sought broadly popular programs—programs that were, consequently, inferior.

But Orton and like-minded thinkers did not really consider lousy programs by themselves the underlying problem with this commercial system of popularly dictated culture. Rather, he and others asserted, American radio fostered the creation of mass culture. And the concept of mass culture terrified thinkers devoted to late-nineteenth-century ideals such as a traditional liberal emphasis on individual freedoms and the importance of cultural progress.⁵ As advertisers planned programs that would maximize profits, they did not set out to appeal to low tastes; that was a side effect. Radio producers, Orton and others claimed, set out to appeal to a mass taste—that is, to smooth over differences between people's tastes and create a homogeneously approved product. When fully developed, then, this argument moved beyond elitism or a simple defense of high culture; it attacked not popular culture per se but a forced uniformity of culture and thought. Radio, these critics worried, treated a diverse collection of Americans as a single mass bloc: multiple publics became a singular “the public.” Profit demanded radio appeal to the “mass-mind,” Orton declared. But no such thing actually existed. The mass-mind, he wrote, was the creation of advertisers. Orton argued, “Society consists in reality of a very large number of distinct minorities, with different needs and different interests” (*America* 256–57; “Level” 8–9; “Memorandum”).⁶

Mass culture, Orton railed, attacked those distinct minorities; it ignored their different needs and different interests. The very concept of a mass-mind devalued cultural diversity and, at best, neglected those individuals and groups who did not conform to a bland, standardized, and artificial common taste. At worst, mass culture eroded the foundations of democracy, excluding diverse groups from meaningful participation in the whole. “As a member of a not inconsiderable minority I [should] still [be able to] get enjoyment from my radio set for some hours everyday,” Orton wrote. “And that is democracy. Where shall I find it in America?” (“Level” 8–10; “Memorandum”). Orton never indicated if he meant to include racial or ethnic minorities among those squeezed out by mass culture; African Americans, for example, certainly could have argued—and at times did—that radio overlooked their interests. He focused on cultural minorities, especially those who valued high culture, but his reasoning could be more broadly applied. Mass culture conceived of people not as individuals or thinkers, he said, but only as undifferentiated consumers (“Level” 7).

Just as mass culture devalued the individual, Orton claimed, it also devalued individual creativity. In other words, mass culture stifled the artistic and cultural progress Orton and others revered. In a system in which popularity served as the measure of artistic success, creative advance, excellence, and genius had no place, he lamented. “To expect cultural leadership, artistic or intellectual pioneering, from the mass is more than even Mr. Coolidge would venture,” Orton

wrote (“Level” 4; see also “Memorandum”). He believed in standards fixed in something firmer than the latest program ratings, and worried about the modern commercial world melting that bedrock. Taking Orton’s fears in another direction, sociologist Jerome Davis suggested that mass and high culture could not coexist on the air. Bad culture, Davis wrote, would drive out the good because, in order to win listenership, mass culture teemed with excitement. By comparison, many found high culture dull, he observed (330). The very presence of mass culture debilitated attempts at cultural uplift.

And that, some of mass culture’s critics claimed, would destroy American society. Orton placed cultural progress near the center of the human mission. As mass culture threatened that progress by demanding conformity, then, it demeaned humanity, he suggested. Orton and others believed in the late-nineteenth-century idea of art and high culture as certain and elevating. He disdained radio in the United States in part because it belonged to a world that rejected such thinking. The supremacy of the profit motive, Orton wrote, “renders social life progressively more meaningless and more brutal” (*America* 264; “Level” 4–9). To varying degrees, others, including Rorty, shared Orton’s fear for the future of elevating culture—and America—in the face of mass culture’s debilitating standards. “When this idea of ‘let the people rule’ is uncritically applied in education, what happens is that first education perishes and eventually civilization perishes,” Rorty wrote (“Impending” 720; also Davis 318). If America did not allow for individuals to stand out, to push the culture intellectually and artistically, Orton and others doubted if society could survive. “The redemption of the mass,” Orton wrote, “cannot come except from minorities” (“Level” 8).

It is not surprising, then, that these critics had no faith in radio’s much-trumpeted educational potential. As long as radio sought to educate the masses, Orton and other commentators claimed, educators would have to water down their content and spice up their presentation to such a degree that a program could offer little of value. The desire to teach the mass-mind meant that radio would not offer anything beyond the grasp of a thirteen-year-old, Orton complained (“Level” 6; *America* 255–56). Moreover, since listeners could easily tune out, educators would have to sell their programs, just like commercial ones. That meant eliminating rigor and challenging or complex ideas; it meant condensing education into sensational entertainment. As conservative editor Travis Hoke wrote:

The new cultural process will be pleasant and tedium will be gone. . . . For it will be discovered that the “radiot” . . . will not listen long nor to big words, and cannot be forced to stay in class nor after school. It is too easy to flip the dial to another station. . . . Doubtless the day will soon be at hand when five minutes will be enough for Einstein, theme song and all (471).

In other words, critics noted, it meant dissolving the benefits of education in a mass-produced syrup. The fact is, Hoke charged, “a thing can go by the name of education and still be worthless” (473–74).⁷

Questioning radio’s value as an educational device amounted to a serious attack on the medium. Radio executives, politicians, and educators all raved about radio’s educational promise. Here, broadcasting’s defenders said, their medium would fulfill its high calling. Even those who wanted to reform the existing system believed that radio, in the ideal, could revolutionize learning, bringing at least a base level of education to isolated reaches of the country.⁸ But even there, Orton and other mass culture critics scoffed at radio’s potential. “Where do educators get the idea that radio is a promising educational medium?” Hoke blasted (474). The very nature of the medium made it incompatible with education. Radio—mass culture—encouraged passive learning, standardized ideas, and failed to inspire analytical thinking, Orton charged. Yes, he admitted, radio could reach far-flung listeners. But to what end? “Radio has brought no new asset of major importance to education, and its use involves serious disabilities,” he wrote (“Level” 5–7; *America* 255–56). Since the first scheduled radio broadcast in 1920, the editors of the *New Republic* noted, they had heard all about radio’s educational promise. The medium had not delivered, they declared: “The present trend of educational theory is away from learning by mere sitting back and listening—all that radio has thus far been able to provide” (“Radio and Education” 357; see also Hoke 474; Simpson 777). Radio might be able to disseminate information, but such distance learning could not demand that listeners discipline their minds or think on their own.

Radio, Orton feared, promoted passivity in general. A mass medium pumping entertainment into the home at all hours enabled Americans to spend leisure time listening instead of doing, he noted, giving voice to another critique that would echo across years and media. Music fans, for instance, became consumers of melodies instead of creators. “Any summer evening of the 1920’s, suburban streets were enlivened by Millie’s efforts to render the new ‘song hit’ on the family piano,” Orton wrote in 1936. “The modern Millie flops down by the radio” (“Radio and the Public” 351; also “Culture” 752).⁹ When Edward Bellamy had imagined a broadcasting system nearly fifty years before Orton’s commentary, the utopian writer cheered centralized musical broadcasting in part because it meant the Millies of the world would not have to sing or play. Anyone could hear well-played music anytime (59–62). Decades of standardization, however, made anything that discouraged creativity and personal differentiation seem ominous to Orton. Unlike Bellamy, Orton worried about radio blurring passive individuals into a standard mass.

To the economist, the modern world justified that concern. He saw mass production, mass consumption, and—in part due to radio—mass thinking gnawing away at personal and cultural uniqueness and excellence. Traditionally,

Orton explained, the genius of the United States lay in its meaningful face-to-face interactions. "American individualism," he wrote in praise, "means, historically and dynamically, an instinctive preference for the concrete, personal, spontaneous process of community life over the abstract, general, artificial processes of law, politics, and, above all, finance." Anything that threatened this individualism consequently threatened the heart of America. More and more, he worried, remote, abstract, and concentrated forces intruded on Americans' lives. More and more, Americans felt the anonymous grip of a central government, a national economy, a New York-based culture. The United States, Orton still maintained in the early 1930s, consisted of many local communities linked to a central whole by thin wires. But those links were becoming more intrusive; an artificial and standard mass life was taking hold (*America* 13–15).¹⁰ And Orton feared for the future of American individualism.

Outside of all that—beyond the mass culture critics' liberal devotion to the individual and the anti-radio stance it engendered—these thinkers did not like radio because it made the jarring, rattling modern world impossible for them to avoid. A strain of cultural conservatism ran deeply through many of these public intellectuals, and they found the modern world too commercial, too loud, too fast-paced—all that the traditional, contemplative, rarified world of high culture was not supposed to be. Mass media helped foster that modern world, and mass media made that world increasingly hard to escape. Radio could infiltrate even the home; it transformed the air itself into a subversive agent of unwelcome change. "The wholesale exploitation of sound in the various perversions of money getting is a far worse thing than the desecration of the countryside by billboards," Orton wrote. "It is at once more intimate and more degrading" ("Level" 7; also *America* 257). Radio allowed one nowhere to hide from the new world. "Whether you hear them or not, those incessant programs penetrate your flesh and blood, you breathe them in," novelist Irving Fineman wailed (379). To the Beards, something important was lost as the endless cacophony injected the exhausting speed of industrial life into entertainment and culture. "Now the canned rumbles, thumps, and rattles poured out of radio sets, unremittingly and ceaselessly," they wrote. "Amid all the din, however, one thing could not be refuted: contemplation, meditation, and quiet reading were becoming increasingly difficult" (647–49). The intrusion of commercial concerns into the cultural realm offended these critics' sense of order. They clung to a Victorian notion of public and private spheres and despised radio for violating the divide between base economic concerns and lofty cultural ones. "The association of cultural programs—such as opera broadcasts—with commercial salesmanship is inherently degrading to art and artists, and is likely to do harm rather than good in the long run," Orton thundered. "In my view, no compromise is possible on this question" ("Memorandum"; see also Lardner, "Perfect" 31).¹¹

Indeed, to Orton and like-minded thinkers, there could be scarcely any compromise on the larger question of radio's existence. Radio helped create and disseminate a mass culture, which, these writers claimed, embodied all that endangered modern America. Radio treated distinct individuals and groups as an undifferentiated collective. In doing so, radio demanded conformity and rejected excellence. To Orton and others who placed cultural progress as the highest human goal, this proved doubly jarring. In devaluing individualism, mass culture made creative intellectual and artistic advance impossible. This critique proved resonant. In the wake of World War II, intellectuals would level similar charges. In his influential postwar analysis, for instance, critic Dwight MacDonald revoiced Orton's fears about mass culture dissolving the individual (8–13, 36–40).¹²

Perhaps part of the reason this interpretation reemerged so notably after World War II was that, on one level, the mass culture critique of radio had a fairly conservative streak to it. These thinkers began by objecting that program quality did not measure up to high standards and therefore wrought certain ills. In the 1930s, of course, most critics looked beyond the programs themselves and blamed commercial control of radio for creating a standardized cultural expression. But a writer could assail mass culture without exploring that connection. And even the many public intellectuals who recognized the systemic roots of radio's flaws did not always condemn that system in general. It took a leap to go from saying that commercial control of culture debased that culture to saying that ever-growing capitalism in general posed a danger—a leap not all the mass culture critics always wanted to make. Other public intellectuals, however, did.

James Rorty and the Capitalist Critique

For those public intellectuals who identified with the political left, dwelling on the question of radio as mass culture missed the larger issue at hand. To this group, radio's relationship to capitalism posed far more serious troubles. They also saw dangers in a mass world, but explained the nature of such a society in America in very different terms; instead of dwelling on the homogenization of culture, they focused on the centralization of power due to large-scale capitalism. These critics saw the commercial control of radio as a dire problem because it placed a tremendously influential technology in the service of an extremely undemocratic minority: the captains of capitalism. Radio, these commentators worried during the Depression, would only hasten the antidemocratic trend that had accelerated in the late nineteenth century toward the centralization of control of American life in the hands of big business. Like most public intellectuals, those on the left stressed the commercial control of radio in their analyses. These thinkers, though, used that as a beginning point. Through its domination of radio, business could redefine the public interest and censor what America

heard on the air. And business did so, said these critics, to promote its own interests. Because this collection of writers believed in radio's influence, they argued that turning the medium over to capitalist propaganda could have serious consequences for the future of democracy. They feared the rise of a commercial fascism. They lamented the lost opportunity for widespread education. Radio could be a beneficial force, they felt, but as a tool of the capitalist system, the medium would only further the antidemocratic destruction capitalism had wreaked upon America for decades.¹³

Like the mass culture critics, the critics of capitalism tended to leave ordinary listeners out of their assessments of America as a mass society. They would have explained their emphasis on the structure of the broadcasting industry by pointing to its power: listeners had little room to resist radio's messages, they believed. They may have overstated their point, but it was an evaluation that raised compelling questions, questions some critics on the left would continue to ask for decades. It was, however, also an evaluation that made most Americans, intellectual or otherwise, increasingly uncomfortable as the political climate changed after the Depression.

The Depression had pushed leftist intellectuals into a more active and vocal critique of the United States. Writers in influential opinion journals such as the *New Republic* and *The Nation* could call for left-wing and vaguely Marxist reforms without slipping out of generally acceptable intellectual currents. Such journals provided space for what were, at least in the 1930s, vaguely mainstream challenges to capitalism.¹⁴ A diverse array of intellectuals considered radio from this political ground; none, however, evaluated it more thoroughly than journalist and poet James Rorty. Only author Ruth Brindze came close to explaining the capitalist critique of the medium as fully and to spreading that analysis as widely as Rorty—although many others, including editors of the *New Republic* such as Bruce Bliven and journalist Heywood Broun, also periodically gave voice to pieces of this argument. Born in New York State in 1890, one year after Orton, Rorty, like Orton, engaged in graduate studies and served in World War I. After the war Rorty worked intermittently as an advertising copy writer and as a journalist, including helping to found *New Masses*. By the Depression he had abandoned advertising, but his knowledge of the field would inform his critiques of American society and radio through the 1930s. Again like Orton, Rorty affiliated loosely with educators' push for radio reform; Rorty, however, sympathized with the most radical of the reform organizations, the National Committee on Education by Radio. Obviously, Rorty's views reflected his political stand. Although Rorty shifted his party identification from the Communists to the Socialists over the course of the 1930s, he remained a committed Marxist critic of capitalism—and of its influence over broadcasting ("Introduction"; Phelps 90–91; McChesney 63, 87).

Unlike the mass culture critics, who began their assessments of radio by assailing the programs on the air, Rorty and other political radicals founded their

attacks on their evaluations of the structure of the broadcasting industry. Big business, they vociferously explained, controlled radio in the interests of private gain. From the early broadcasts on, Rorty wrote, industry and business had enslaved the medium. "The whole art of radio was originally conceived of as a sales device," he explained (*Our Master's Voice* 14).¹⁵ Ruth Brindze and others echoed that viewpoint: "Broadcasting in America has always been an industry whose primary purpose has not been public service but private profit" (*Not to Be* 15; also "On the Air" 146; Broun, "Labor" 190). The commercial masters of the radio industry, Rorty allowed, secured their hold subtly, encouraging listeners to think those who twirled the dials had the final say over radio. Rorty and his fellows, however, dismissed the idea that by tuning out or by writing a letter to a station, a listener could control the airwaves (Rorty, *Order* 8–9). Baloney, Rorty said; commercial interests would always win out over a listener's desires if the two clashed. Radio was no different from any of the technological advances that had engulfed America in recent decades. "Every genie, such as radio, that pops out of the laboratory bottle of modern science," he lamented, "is [put] to work making money for whoever happens to hold the neck of the bottle" ("Free Air" 280–81).

The critics of capitalist broadcasting largely traced radio's structural flaws back to the commercial networks' near-absolute monarchy of the air. Even though only about a third of the nation's stations were affiliated with NBC and CBS, the two networks ruled almost 90% of the nation's transmitting power because they controlled most of the high-power stations across the country. To critics such as Rorty, Brindze, and journalist Rion Bercovici, this monopoly of the airwaves guaranteed that radio would serve America's commercial interests (Brindze, "Who Owns" 230 and *Not to Be* 26–28; Rorty, *Order* 24; Bercovici 23). Beyond appeasing business because of their reliance on advertising revenues, the networks were big businesses in their own right and were owned by the same huge financial powers that controlled many of America's banks, power trusts, and corporations, the crusading writers noted (Brindze, *Not to Be* 11; Bercovici 24). Network domination of the ether left almost no room for any broadcasters who did not share the commercial cause, these critics charged.

The issue at stake in the commercial control of radio, Rorty believed, was the same one that lay at the heart of America's challenges in an era in which, after running rampant for years, industrial capitalism had crashed: should America's resources profit private exploiters or serve the public interest ("Impending" 715)? As American society tried to resolve the question, Rorty and others feared that outmoded *laissez-faire* thinking blurred the distinction. Federal law required that radio serve the public interest. But, Rorty bemoaned, broadcasters wrongly interpreted the public interest clause to mean what interested the public. Popular programs, he wrote, did not automatically fulfill the public interest ("Impending" 720). Rorty might have questioned if there was even a singular public whose interests could be neatly identified, but he had little doubt whose

interests were served by measuring radio with a popularity standard: those of corporate America. Like Orton, Rorty rejected the idea that the pursuit of popular programming fostered a democratic medium. Both programming and popularity were easily manipulated by those who paid for the air time, critics of capitalism maintained. In radio, as in American society at large, leftist commentators charged, the United States had equated public interest with corporate interest (Rorty, *Order* 14–15; Davis 334). On the air, Rorty and like-minded thinkers suggested, America had replicated the worst of its modern-era sins.

In fact, these critics asserted, the American radio system did not simply replicate the modern problem of undemocratic corporate domination of society but worsened it. Unlike other industries, in which a few business elites controlled goods, the commercial monopoly of radio gave that elite control of American thought. In the American broadcasting system, corporations had the power to censor and dictate on-air discussions and, in turn, to shape listeners' values and ideas. Advertisers, the leftist thinkers lamented, decreed what subjects broadcasters could address and what points of view programs could support. In playwright George Kaufman's light short story "God Gets an Idea," even the Almighty himself is told by an advertising executive he cannot discuss controversial subjects such as religion and evil on the air (208).¹⁶ Because of radio's powerful national reach, commentators on the left believed that allowing one group sway over radio's content in that manner gave that group a staggering influence over American tastes and values. "The radio," the *New Republic* editorialized, "is an instrument, not for the free formulation of public opinion, but for molding it to suit the purposes of the small group of men who control the most important aspects of our national economic life" ("Week" 58). Radio served as a means of molding public opinion to the needs of business, Rorty and like-minded thinkers feared. America seemed in the midst of trading away the very concept of democratic free thought, these radicals shuddered. "Do you realize Ladies and Gentlemen of the Great Radio Audience," Rorty wrote, "that your ears and your minds are offered for sale to the highest bidder . . . ?" ("Free Air" 281; also "Impending" 715; Brindze *Not to Be* 90, 287–88).

And that highest bidder used the medium as its own propagandist machine. In substantial part through radio, these writers alleged, corporate America imbued the culture with consumer capitalist values, a belief system that reinforced business's growing dominance. The Depression could have led Americans to question their political and economic system, but radio gave capitalism an additional, influential means of promoting its own ideals. Advertising had made the new American culture of the twentieth century possible, said Rorty, no doubt drawing on his personal exposure to the field. Such business propaganda secured the dominance of commercial values, he wrote: "Advertising has to do with the shaping of economic, social, moral and ethical patterns of the community into serviceable conformity with the profit-making

interests of advertisers and of the advertising business" (*Our Master's Voice* 16). And by the 1930s, Rorty explained, radio had become one of business and finance's major propaganda instruments (*Order* 25). For decades critics on the left had worried about business's influence, of course, but radio had enabled corporate America to disseminate its ideology still more effectively. With America's consumer system at risk in the Depression, commercial leaders more and more enlisted radio in their effort to convince consumers of the virtues of that system (Bercovici 25; Orton, "Radio for Robots" 195). The flood of ads on the radio, for instance, taught listeners that they could buy solutions to their problems, writers such as Brindze and the *New Republic's* T. R. Carskadon charged (*Not to Be* 97; Carskadon 71). Even a nonradical such as William Orton recognized the corporate control of American values and radio's significance as a propaganda source supporting that control. "Big business has in fact come to occupy in America very much the position occupied by the Church in mediaeval Europe," he wrote. "[It] moulds the forms and sets the standards of social intercourse, permeates while it patronizes the national culture in a hundred ways" ("Unscrambling" 438).

Orton, however, primarily feared that giving big business such influence would degrade America's artistic and intellectual culture. The critics of capitalism worried far more about the capitalist broadcasting system's potential to crush democracy. Leftist public intellectuals believed commercial radio as it existed would make a mockery of the free speech and free thought they believed essential to a democracy. The monotone on the air would drown out diverse individual voices. Financial powers, they worried, would control public expression and, in turn, the views and voices of the people. Since access to the powerful propaganda machine of the airwaves depended on one's bank account, radio further helped transform financial power into social power, Rorty wrote (*Order* 12). Freedom of speech, Brindze explained, lay at the foundation of democracy: without open opportunities to influence public opinion, the voice of the people could express nothing more than a squawk of a parrot (*Not to Be* 287–88; also Davis 316). And through radio, big business had more fully gained control over American speech. Advertising became America's primary form of communication, Rorty claimed (*Our Master's Voice* 17–18). Democracy suffered. Would a radio system that allowed big business such influence "reenforce economic conservatism, strengthen vulgarity, and drive the American mind to an undemocratic Right?" the Beards asked rhetorically (650).

To some of these left-leaning thinkers, this broadcasting system inspired fears of fascism in the United States. The hallmark of fascism—at home or in Germany and Italy—they suggested, was not a governmental dictatorship, but an undemocratic rule on behalf of the interests of economic powers.¹⁷ World War II forced these commentators to reconsider that stand later, but during the 1930s they saw unchecked capitalism as the leading forerunner of fascism and a

threat to democracy. Consequently, radio in the service of capitalists proved especially alarming for those who shared the twin 1930s leftist values of economic justice and democratic anti-fascism. In European nations the government censored the air, the *New Republic* reported. But, the editors asked, was that really worse than censorship by “the ultra-conservative public utility magnates who for the most part govern our airwaves?” (“For Better Broadcasting” 202; also Filler 11). To these thinkers, modern capitalism was antithetical to liberty and democracy; they equated a worldwide rise in fascism with the modern expansion of big business’s social control—a control American radio readily facilitated. “Broadcasting is controlled by our moguls of business and finance. This is the class which in Italy and Germany has benefited most from that new form of government known as fascism,” Brindze wrote. “If fascism ever happens here, the new leaders will not have to seize the radio; they already control it” (*Not to Be* 7–8, 3–4, 251–53, 258, 287–89).

The trouble, as capitalism’s critics saw it, was not that, as a mass communication form, radio was automatically destructive. Radio could have an immensely powerful influence on millions of listeners, but in the ideal it was neither good nor bad. The cause of the severe problems with American radio, these thinkers explained, lay almost wholly in who controlled the medium. “Whoever owns the agencies for the distribution of ideas is most likely to control the people. Radio today ranks as perhaps the most important force for the dissemination of ideas in American life,” Jerome Davis explained, expressing the leftist intellectuals’ sense of radio’s promise as well as danger. But he also noted, “We have permitted this incalculably valuable and powerful tool to fall into the hands of the power-trust group, which includes the radio trust” (315–16). Rorty and others would have agreed with Davis’s assessment. For all its faults, Rorty believed, radio had to play a key role in the struggle to redefine democracy in modern America. Decades of drastic social and economic changes had unsettled the American social system, and necessitated communication to reorder America; radio was, he claimed, “our major instrument of social communication” (*Order* 10).

In this regard, of course, capitalism’s critics such as Rorty differed sharply from the mass culture critics, including Orton. Both groups disdained the mass qualities they saw in modern America, but they defined the essence of those qualities differently. To Rorty and his fellows, the primary problem with mass media was not its tendency to treat people as an undifferentiated bloc, but the centralized control it facilitated. Where Orton condemned radio as communication for the many, Rorty and like-minded thinkers applauded the potential of a medium that could reach the multitudes, and instead focused their attack on who directed that medium and to what ends.

Similarly, where Orton and others generally dismissed radio as an educational medium, intellectuals on the left occasionally trumpeted broadcasting’s

impressive—if almost entirely untapped—educational potential. Bruce Bliven, editor of the *New Republic*, jabbed at American radio for doing nothing to educate listeners, but said that in the right hands, radio could serve the cause of popular learning (342). Davis claimed that radio was absolutely essential to the critical task of adult education in the United States (330).¹⁸ None of these radical critics believed American radio actually fulfilled their educational agenda in the slightest, but the potential for popular education they saw in the medium excited them. Rorty wrote:

The radio looks to me like the most revolutionary instrument of communication ever placed in human hands; it seems to me that its free and creative use, not to make money, but to further education and culture and to inform public opinion is perhaps the most crucial problem with which our civilization is confronted. (“Free Air” 280)

Rorty believed in radio’s educational potential. He had his doubts, though, whether education itself could save America. Decades of technological and industrial innovation had fostered social and economic changes that placed business interests ahead of human interests, Rorty explained. Could education as it currently existed do anything more than teach people to fit neatly into that dehumanizing capitalist culture? he wondered. In bleaker moments, Rorty suggested that giving educators access to the air would do little to reform society: educators too had caught the values of capitalism, and would only train people to work within those values (“Impending” 722–23).

The problems with radio, as Rorty saw them, were the problems facing American society—a society that in the Depression seemed to reveal the horrors of industrial capitalism on a mass scale. Scientific and economic changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had completely reconfigured America, centralizing authority and giving business never-before-seen power, Rorty believed. But the nation’s ideas and tactics had not kept pace with those changes; America’s outdated culture offered no ways to manage the new realities. Only by overcoming that cultural lag, he explained, could America be saved.¹⁹ “Granted that radio is socially and politically one of the most revolutionary additions to the pool of human resources in all history,” he wrote, “how does one go about integrating it with a civilization which itself functions with increasing difficulty and precariousness?” (“Impending” 714). Broadcasting was plagued by the same troubles racking the whole of society, he explained. Rorty looked at the American broadcasting system and saw capitalism spinning out of control; he looked at America and saw the same thing. “It may be,” he claimed, “that at bottom this chaos is merely a phase of the conflict between science and politics, between industry and business, between ownership and management, between class and class, between our advanced technological means and our obsolete social and economic mores and institutions” (*Order 7*).

Radio, Rorty frequently declared, mirrored America. To the leftist critics of radio, American broadcasting seemed deeply threatening and corrupt because it was embedded in a social order overwhelmed by decades of threatening and corrupt changes. They disdained radio because they disdained the centralized and commercial society they saw gripping America. This critique was at once more tolerant and far broader than Orton's mass culture critique. The mass culture critics opposed mass culture entirely and saw little to redeem radio as mass communication; Rorty and other critics of capitalism believed society might benefit from radio if only the medium were properly organized and controlled. On the other hand, although some mass culture critics did jab at America's capitalist order, the central tenets of their critique did not automatically challenge that basic organization of society. Clearly, Rorty and his ilk did so: radio was simply the vehicle by which they assailed the rise of industrial capitalism. This made their attack both more scathing and more tenuous. The critics of capitalism called for drastic and far-reaching changes in the 1930s. But in the face of World War II and, later, the reactionary climate of the Cold War, they would find that radical analysis more and more difficult to maintain.

Even during the Depression, though, radio had proponents among public intellectuals. They could not, of course, match the prominence radio's critics had among the general well-read audience. The medium's defenders were a clear minority among intellectual commentators. And their stake in their stand was often plain: they tended to be involved in broadcasting themselves, either as contributors to various radio programs or as network employees. Moreover, the analyses offered by supporters of radio lacked the sophistication of the ones put forth by the medium's foes. And yet, as the Depression passed into world war and the Cold War, defenses of radio often drowned out more-critical evaluations. Beginning around 1940, critics of capitalism such as Rorty wavered just a bit in their attacks on commercial radio as international events raised fears of an undemocratic state controlling society. Understandably, both the political climate in Nazi Germany and World War II made it harder for many to point to capitalism as the leading source of totalitarianism, and the Cold War conservatism that followed further discouraged such stands. Consequently, the most strident intellectual challenge to American radio fell out of step with the social and political climate after the 1930s. The mass culture critique could have, and did, remain current after the Depression, but it did not present a tremendously forceful attack. It was a viewpoint easily brushed off on the grounds that it reflected only elite tastes and ignored popular desires.

All of this meant that the ideas of radio's intellectual defenders had staying power beyond the originality of their insights. These commentators considered American radio a supremely democratic arena—in part because they saw audiences controlling the medium by voting with their tuning dials. The commercial nature of the system, they argued, meant that popular opinion determined pro-

gramming and minimized the risk of state tyranny. Certainly neither the mass culture critics nor the critics of capitalism expressed such faith in radio's listeners: both found flaws with popular opinion as a measuring stick, and both left audience desires out of their analyses. But if the bulk of radio's critics did not undertake populist approaches to their subject, they also did not simply look down their noses at common listeners nor dismiss their voices blindly—at least not entirely. Orton and others of his school of thought were not merely elitists: they worried that the effort to appeal to a mass taste would drown out all individual voices. And although they perhaps overstated the absolute nature of the threat capitalism posed to free thought, Rorty and like-minded critics were right that broadcasting tended to concentrate opinion-making power in the hands of the businesses that controlled the airwaves. Comparatively, radio's proponents did little more than accept the old idea that private enterprise promoted freedom, and apply that idea to the new mass communication. This thinking, as critics pointed out in the 1930s, overlooked essential new questions about both the nature of a uniform mass culture and the control of that culture by centralized capitalist forces.

For most of the commentators seeking to understand broadcasting at its dawn, those were precisely the issues that most needed exploring. The bulk of the thinkers seeking to reach a well-educated but broad audience wrote in opposition to the growing medium. They did so because radio seemed to them to represent and foster America's burgeoning mass society. The new world appalled them: it appeared homogeneous and centralized, with little room for individual distinction or autonomy. As the likes of William Orton and James Rorty assailed radio as mass culture at its most degrading or as capitalism at its most controlling, America's public intellectuals laid out occasionally overlapping, occasionally conflicting positions. For one set of thinkers, the modern world's dangers lay chiefly in the cultural realm; for another, the ascending medium and world threatened the balance of power within America's social system. But both sets of critics explicitly connected what they saw as the ills of the mass medium to those of their modern society; they understood radio in terms of the rising American culture they so feared. And the questions they asked—questions, at root, about the individual's place in modern mass society—remain unresolved.

Notes

1. In Bellamy's story, listeners paid for their music and lectures through a subscription fee, not unlike cable television a century later except without the advertisements. Both the funding of America's broadcasting system in the 1930s and its programming, then, took a shape very different from what Bellamy imagined.

2. The Beards were hardly alone. For others with a similar sense, see Pells 98–101. Moreover, many early-twentieth-century critics similarly saw other forms of popular culture encapsulating these problems of modern America. Gorman 9.

3. For more on intellectual journals in the 1930s, see Tebbel and Zuckerman 199–226.

4. For more on Lardner's career as a radio critic, see Yardley 363–67.
5. For more on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century views of the ideals of liberalism, individualism, culture, and progress, see Hoover; Levine 177, 200–31; May 30–51; Trachtenberg 5, 140–63; Czitrom 31–35.
6. For others with related views, see Filler 12; Brindze, *Not to Be* 91; Davis 318.
7. Hoke's proposal for educating a mass audience revealed his conservative faith in an elite hierarchy: educate intelligent people fully and others only enough to be happy in their ignorance.
8. For a useful account of the battle in the early 1930s over creating a radio system that would benefit education, see McChesney, whose book recounts the struggle in detail.
9. In this regard radio accelerated an evolution in leisure that began before radio and continued as other media arose. The tendency toward passive leisure has continued with the advent of television, the VCR, and other technologies; it is not obvious that recent developments such as the Internet will change that trend.
10. Here Orton's views resembled those of another self-proclaimed liberal, Herbert Hoover. Both saw individualism as crucial to America's success, and both found it endangered. Many of the ideas in Hoover's 1922 essay *American Individualism* resonate in Orton's work. See particularly Hoover 14, 21–27. The growing national standardization and unification Orton described would not surprise many historians studying this era. See, for example, Wiebe xiii–xiv.
11. For a discussion of the Victorian sense of separate cultural and economic spheres, and the Victorian idea of culture in general, see Levine 177, 200–31; May 30–51; Trachtenberg 5, 140–63; Czitrom 31–36.
12. Republished several times with minor tweaking, Dwight MacDonald's important essay, "Masscult and Midcult" revisited many of Orton's concerns about mass culture for readers in post-World War II America. See also Gorman 167–73.
13. Not surprisingly, some Marxist thinkers and New York intellectuals developed similar critiques of other popular culture venues in the 1930s. To some on the left, popular culture was simply capitalist propaganda to exploit the masses. Gorman 108–10, 120–21, 138–43.
14. For more on the mainstream left, see Pells 49–50, 94–95, 395–97; for more on left-wing journals, see Tebbel and Zuckerman 203–9.
15. Even before stations put advertisements on the air, Rorty correctly explained, the motivation for regular broadcasts was to sell more radio sets.
16. See also Davis 321, 327; Brindze, *Not to Be* 263–66; Rorty, *Order* 22; Broun, "Labor" 190; Orton, "Radio for Robots," 198.
17. This was a common understanding of fascism in the 1930s. For a clear example of this view, see Swing 22.
18. When making official pitches to reform radio, even Orton suggested that if the federal government controlled broadcasting, it could serve an educational purpose. Orton, "Memorandum on Radio Policy."
19. The concept of cultural lag was common among intellectuals in the 1930s. See Ross 443–44; Pells 119; Dewey 13–16.

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CHAPTER 4**“YOUR VOICE CAME IN LAST NIGHT . . . BUT I THOUGHT IT SOUNDED A LITTLE SCARED”****Rural Radio Listening and “Talking Back” during the Progressive Era in Wisconsin, 1920–1932**

Derek Vaillant

ON 21 FEBRUARY 1925 EARL M. TERRY, broadcast chief of state-operated WHA radio in Madison, Wisconsin, and an associate professor of physics at the University of Wisconsin, received a disquieting letter from a male farmer and listener. “Dear Sir,” the letter from C. H. Alsmeyer began,

I have for a long time been whanting [sic] to take my pickaxe and go after someone but did not know who but seen your talk in the *Capitol Times* and so think that you may be one of the guilty ones.¹

Terry had recently criticized rural WHA listeners in the local press for their tepid response to uplifting classical music broadcasts. Alsmeyer wrote to disabuse Terry of any notion that rural listeners were quiescent or disinterested in steering the operations of their state-sponsored radio station. “Give us something with a melody and you will git [sic] the applause,” he explained:

“Carry me Back to Old Verginia,” [sic] “Just as the Sun Went Down,” “Hot Time,” or “My Best Girl”—something with a tune—a melody—git someone with a fiddle another with an old banjo. I said fiddle don’t mean a VIOLIN. . . . If you will do something like that you will git the aplause [sic] cards and we the tax payers will vote you the biggest station in the U.S.A.

Alsmeyer’s fondness for songs, such as “Carry Me Back to Old Virginia,” reflected a preference among working- and middle-class whites for a nostalgic brand of

postbellum blackface song linked to America's transformation from a predominately rural to a predominately urban nation in the late nineteenth century. Alsmeyer's fantasy of routing the donnish men in bow ties sitting behind the microphones at the WHA studios broadcasting uplifting classical music, and replacing them with a brace of fiddle and banjo players, reflected deep-seated social tensions dividing male farmers from their urban professional counterparts.

"One of the controlling myths of the 1920s," notes historian Paul Glad, "was a fear amongst rural Wisconsinites that they were destined to lose out to urban industrial prosperity and that country life as they had known it was on the wane." Alienation from the modern metropolis transformed by industrialization and immigration and fear of being outmoded in the modern world of technology-dependent agricultural production worried rural Americans, particularly male farmers such as Alsmeyer, and exacerbated tensions between them and their perceived adversaries in cities (Danbom; Higham; Swierenga; Wiebe). During the 1920s in Wisconsin these issues shifted to the airwaves, as rural radio listeners and urban radio producers struggled to define the character of public broadcasting.

Stung by Alsmeyer's rebuke, Terry produced a less-than-neighborly reply defending the use of classical music on WHA and the broader implications of this program choice. "Having been brought up on a farm myself," he wrote,

I think I know pretty well the character of programs you would most enjoy. In as much as this is a state station we must be very particular with regard to the character of the material broadcast, and it is our policy to send out nothing which does not have a high degree of merit. . . . The air is overcrowded every night with jazz and other worthless material, and it would be quite beneath the dignity of the University to add to it.

Terry closed with the unrepentant declaration that as long as he was in charge of programming, "old time fiddler" music would *never* be heard on the WHA airwaves.²)

The pugnacious exchange between Alsmeyer and Terry reflected a sharp divide between certain rural listeners and state radio programmers. Alsmeyer expected his state radio station to validate his values and identity as a male farmer steeped in a specific set of social and cultural traditions. He demanded radio service accountable to the rural masses as he imagined them rather than to the elite disciples of cultural uplift and agricultural modernization. Old-style "coon" and fiddler songs personified all that Alsmeyer found pleasurable and authentic in an era when urbanization pulled men and women off the farm and cultural uplift threatened to invalidate the lifestyles and values of those who remained behind.

Terry, by contrast, represented the new urban breed—a modern hybrid of farmer and scientist. Growing up, he undoubtedly knew men like Alsmeyer. But he had quit the farm for the city, exchanged overalls for a suit and tie, replaced folk wisdom with hard science, and committed himself to furthering progressive reform and rural transformation via radio. He believed that the mission of WHA was not to indulge rural popular culture, but to reinvent it. WHA must function as a progressive instrument of the state, steering listeners away from "worthless material," such as "coon" or jazz music, and redirecting rural sensibilities toward cosmopolitan ideals with a "high degree of merit." With its vernacular lyrics, simple arrangements, and celebration of a mythic past, Alsmeyer's music smacked of antimodern culture, which is exactly what Terry, and progressive extension radio generally, sought to expunge from the rural landscape.

Broadcasting at WHA began at a time when the pace of the social and cultural transformation of America from a rural society to a predominately urban one was at its most rapid. Over several generations, rural inhabitants had abandoned farming and village life in greater and greater numbers for brighter prospects in the city. By 1920 the U.S. census reported that for the first time a greater percentage of Americans resided in urban areas than in rural settings.³ Stiff challenges faced those who stayed behind in the countryside to farm. After briefly reaching unprecedented heights during World War I, farm prices collapsed and proceeded to drift sideways during much of the 1920s. Many mid-western farmers were left overextended and scrambling to regroup. To policy-makers, academics, and cultural critics it appeared that the yeoman farmer—that mythic hero of nineteenth-century republican virtue—might well become an endangered species. They searched for solutions to slow what was perceived as a national exodus draining talent from the countryside to the city (Atherton; Danbom; Fuller; Kirschner).

Beginning in the 1920s at the University of Wisconsin, and at other land-grant agricultural colleges, reformers such as Professor Terry used radio as an instrument of social and cultural reform (Taylor). State agricultural radio programming in Wisconsin privileged scientific farming methods and the acquisition of new technology over traditional techniques and equipment. It provided weather, crop, and livestock reports and market news. It also celebrated farm family solidarity built on traditional home life, and promoted modern, institutional patterns of community organization in lieu of preexisting folkways.

Many of the cultural reform ideas broadcast into the hinterlands in the 1920s owed their inspiration to the Country Life movement of the previous decade. In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt established a commission to investigate the woes believed to be afflicting rural America. Country Life ideology combined romanticized notions of an idealized, even mythic rural past with sociological concerns about rural depopulation and the privations and pathologies attributed to life on the farm. A Wisconsin rural sociologist, Charles J.

Galpin, became a chief proponent of rural reforms. He decried the “social handicaps” plaguing Wisconsin farmers and argued that the best remedy was community reconstitution.⁴ Government officials and academics established a set of areas for national reform, including communications (“we create a public opinion favorable to progress”), homemaking, education, farming, governance, health and sanitation, recreation, and morals (Rasmussen; Bowers; Kirkendall).

This case study of WHA in the 1920s analyzes the first decade of agricultural extension radio in Wisconsin and the distinctive social and cultural context in which broadcasting reached rural America. I argue that the words of male and female listeners who “talked back” to its reform-minded urban producers in letters reflect ambivalence toward urban-directed modernization and cultural uplift. Histories of early radio have underreported the extent to which tensions between rural and urban ways of life structured dynamics and listener reactions to early radio. It is also true that male and female farmers differed sharply in their receptivity to reform via radio. Their letters articulate different visions of radio’s place and purpose as men and women weathered the challenges of rural life in the 1920s.

The study relies on WHA records, rural social surveys, government documents, local newspapers and journals, and studies of rural Wisconsin and the nation prior to the beginning of broadcasting and during its early years. Above all, it uses information culled from dozens and dozens of listener letters. Station managers scrupulously saved listener correspondence as evidence of their successes and shortfalls in serving the public interest. I use these letters for a slightly different purpose—to map a trajectory of rural listener engagement with radio and to qualitatively assess questions, comments, and suggestions as they reveal shifting desires, expectations, and dreams for state radio as a service in their lives. In quoting from particular letters, I have followed my subjective sense of which of the dozens of letters I examined capture key sentiments, concerns, and issues that seemed representative of the collection as a whole.

In recent years scholars have revealed a far more complicated landscape of audience reception to early radio in the 1920s and early 1930s than previously acknowledged. We know that local and national struggle accompanied the establishment of networks, correcting the assumption that universal approbation and delight greeted direct advertising and corporate control of the airwaves (Smulyan). Congress established the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) to bring order to the airwaves, but the body served less as an impartial arbiter than as a cynical handmaiden for network interests (McChesney; Streeter). Educational, not-for-profit, and independent stations suffered as a result of this bias.

Other scholarly work illuminates the varied ways in which radio listening promoted identity formation. It analyzes marketing and advertising strategies to promote radio. It also considers the phenomenon of “imagined communities” and the formation of a national “radio imaginary” in which listeners negotiated

the symbolic terms of citizenship, gender, class, ethnic, "American," and racial identifications (Barlow; Butsch; Cohen; Douglas; Hilmes; McFadden; Newman). Studies exploring the formation of multiple publics of listeners are especially relevant, as cultural historians continue to deconstruct assumptions about "mass" audiences and social and cultural formations (Denning; Kammen).

Studies of early radio listeners and programmers in the 1920s and 1930s emphasize the importance of local community context, institutions, and ethnic folkways structuring a negotiation with radio and the resulting aspects of identity formation. In the industrial Northeast, where broadcasting established strong roots by the mid-1920s, programs catered to the quotidian needs of industrial America's multilingual, multiethnic populations. Specialized radio outlets helped to redraw boundaries of social and cultural affiliation, such as Chicago's "Voice of Labor," WCFL, which helped unite multiethnic workers in support of the New Deal (Cohen; Godfried).

Excellent content studies of radio programs aimed at rural audiences suggest the importance of regional differentiation, such as in the Piedmont area, and we are coming to know more about the Midwest and the South (Hall et al.; Grundy). National commercial networks are credited with creating specialized programming to serve rural-to-urban migrants settling in large cities, as well as those remaining in the hinterlands who sought hillbilly and later country music on the airwaves (Peterson). Early commercial radio programs curried favor with rural listeners through programs such as the WLS *Barn Dance* and various homemaker programs for women. They spurred a national and regional, rather than local, listener ethos among fans of hillbilly and country music (Gregory). Researchers have also studied the forms and messages of farm and home shows, emphasizing the manner in which such programs and representations domesticated the technology of radio for American consumers by mobilizing gender stereotypes, promoting consumerism (particularly among women), and celebrating the family ideal (Butsch; Marchand; Smulyan).

A social and cultural historical methodology offers an alternative to working back from radio program texts and representations to reveal the listening publics of rural America. The formulaic nature of farm and home programs cannot be confused with, or substituted for, critical study of the diverse audience of rural Americans engaging these broadcasts and, wherever possible, of their reactions to the shows. Without social and contextual specificity, women on farms of the 1920s, to give but one example, risk becoming a banal stereotype alongside their equally caricatured 1950s white, middle-class suburban sisters.

While the strategies and ideological commitments of the Country Life movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are well studied (excluding the later role of radio), comparatively little is known about the nature of rural people's reactions to its uplift doctrines. Struggles and negotiations between farmers and progressive reformers over the nature and content of agricultural exten-

sion radio illuminate issues dividing farmers threatened by modernization of agricultural technology and economics from the scientific experts and rational-systems theorists of progressivism in the United States (Barron; Swierenga).

Agricultural extension outreach in Wisconsin dates to the 1880s, but the influence of Progressive Republicans in the state between 1900 and 1938 pushed state agricultural reform policies forward and supported the innovative work of radio in circulating Progressive and Country Life ideals that continued beyond the period studied here. Governor (and later Senator) Robert M. La Follette and his sons, Philip and Robert junior, spearheaded policies to cement a university-state complex and determine the progressive tenor of the state for the rest of the century (McCarthy; Glad).

The story of the retuning of the farm by radio began officially in January 1920, when 9XM (later WHA) became the first licensed station to broadcast in Wisconsin. The following year Professor W. H. Lighty of the Extension Division of the university became the station's first program director. He derived inspiration from the Progressive ideals of university president Charles Van Hise, who declared: "I shall never rest content until the beneficent influences of the University of Wisconsin are made available in every home of the State." Lighty accordingly began to develop radio broadcasts in consultation with a University Radio Committee of twelve faculty advisors appointed by the university president to serve the people of Wisconsin. In cooperation with Lighty, the College of Agriculture began producing a farm program in 1921 and the *Homemaker's Hour* in 1926. It developed its programs through a radio committee of its own that sent one member to the University Radio Committee.⁵

Beginning with its first program and continuing throughout the 1920s, WHA concentrated on serving rural farmers. The midday *Farm Show* supplied weather forecasts, road reports, and market news daily to southern Wisconsin farmers. In 1924 WHA established a link with WLBL, a state-owned station located at Stevens Point in north-central Wisconsin. The farm and home shows originating in Madison could now be heard across much of the state.⁶

A tone of easy informality characterized early written exchanges between listeners and the station. Early listeners wrote to share their joys and travails with the fascinating novelty of radio, to swap know-how, even to solicit technical advice on gadgetry. By the early 1920s farmers had helped make radio a nationwide hobby industry. Farmers preferred home-built crystal and single-tube radio sets for their simplicity and affordability. The *Wisconsin Agriculturist* published a regular radio column, offering tips to farmers such as how to recharge the sets' dry-cell batteries using gasoline-fueled generators that pumped water.⁷

Rural Wisconsin listeners took to radio as a tool and as a welcome source of entertainment linking them to a world outside. They showed no evidence of being mesmerized or intimidated by this new medium. Listeners scribbled notes at the slightest provocation in order to comment on or to share a question about

the wonders of radio. In May 1922 a listener from Brillion wrote bursting with the news that he had just built a radio for \$10.49 worth of parts, not including batteries and the telephone set he had dismembered and converted into a radio receiver. "I don't see how anyone can be without a set," he concluded gleefully.⁸ When writing, listeners routinely mentioned the type of receiver they used and the brand name where applicable, as well as the number of tubes. At least one even mailed penciled circuitry diagrams to the station, hoping for tips on improving the design of his set. Another curious listener wrote Professor Earl M. Terry to ask if the lightning rod of his farmhouse could double as a radio antenna. In a detailed letter Terry explained that a lightning rod could well serve as an antenna, but advised the farmer to inspect his ground connection (Terry carefully described how to do this) lest his radio set, or even his farm, go up in flames.⁹ The neighborliness of these exchanges reflected an initial realization of broadcasting's potential to remap rural and urban geography, bringing the world of the university and the city closer to the population in the countryside.

While the precise penetration rate of radio into everyday rural life is difficult to measure, communal patterns of use on a significant scale are evident by 1925. By the end of 1927, one in five farm households owned a radio. In the prosperous southern counties of the state, close to Madison and WHA, however, the figure was much higher, averaging more than one set for every three households. Group listening and sharing patterns that were commonplace among farm listeners broadened the rural audience considerably. Owners might invite their radioless friends to hear a concert or a game with them. The *Wisconsin Agriculturist* entreated its rural readers to host "radio parties" to share and celebrate this "new American delight." In modest farm households, owners treated radio as a luxury, reserving it for occasions when it could be enjoyed in a cooperative spirit among family and friends. For those without surplus fuel to power generators, listening alone would be "wasteful" of expensive battery power (only 36% of the state had electricity as late as 1940). Moreover, it denied the collective pleasures of group listening.¹⁰

The early WHA broadcast schedule operated in counterpoint to the rhythms of the farming day. The farm program, produced by personnel from the agricultural college, aired six days a week at midday to reach farmers in from the fields for dinner with their families. The station broadcast the show from 12:30 P.M. to 1:00, then signed off for the rest of the afternoon, while farmers were in the fields, and returned to the air for several hours in the early evening.¹¹ WHA produced the first farm program of its kind in the state, and even after other stations imitated its neighborly mixture of market information and talk and began shows of their own, the popularity of the original *Farm Show* endured.

Evening cultural programs began appearing after 1921 on WHA and ranged from "moral talks" and liberal arts lectures delivered by university faculty to classical concerts featuring the university's orchestra and Big Ten sporting events.

These programs were designed to educate and entertain the farm family and bring them into a closer relationship with university life. By 1925 evening broadcasts began presenting regular talks promoting scientific farming techniques as well as domestic science topics for women; the *Homemaker's Hour* debuted the following year and became a smash hit.¹²

Prior to the introduction of the WHA *Farm Show*, market news reached the countryside via telegraph to post offices, banks, general stores, and newspaper offices. Farmers congregated in these central places, often found at county crossroads, to jot down the latest quotations. Keeping abreast of crucial market fluctuations closer to harvest and slaughtering time must have been a nuisance for farmers hesitant to squander time off the farm. WHA radio obviated the need for a special trip to town, a visit to a neighbor, or a series of telephone calls (assuming one owned a phone) to get an update on the market or an impending rainstorm or frost. Farmers such as Herman Leitz of Ripon responded heartily to the convenience, reporting that he listened to the *Farm Show* every day and that "I think it a very nice thing for the farmer."¹³

Even as the audience for the farm and evening programs grew larger, there were reminders that kinks remained in synchronizing broadcasts with the ingrained patterns of working farmers. Ezra Smith of Lodi wrote WHA in the spring of 1923 to share his appreciation for midday Sunday church services but complained that the timing of the lectures in the evening conflicted with his regular chores. W. J. Heberlieu of Portage expressed a similar conflict when he wrote: "If these programs are for the farmers I am sorry they couldn't be about one hour later say at 8 o'clock as 90% of the farmers are in the midst of the milking process."¹⁴ Without resources to conduct systematic audience research, WHA operators necessarily relied on written feedback in order to gauge the successes or failures of their programs and to make the necessary schedule adjustments to maximize its impact on life in the countryside.

From requests for an evening grace period in which to milk the cows to listener queries about circuits and antennas, rural listener letters to WHA reveal a tacit relationship between themselves and state station personnel. Farmers and WHA programmers in the early era looked to each other as new and mutually supporting neighbors. Listeners used WHA's farm service and readily consulted the technical know-how of station engineers in meeting their particular needs. WHA programmers studied listener difficulties and attempted to provide satisfactory solutions. Programmers mapped farm correspondence to chart their broadcasting range and even sent queries to listeners asking them to tune in and report reception quality when the station ran tests of new equipment.¹⁵ The bonds of reciprocity that rural historians often attribute to agricultural communities prior to modernization found new virtual outlets of expression during an era of "neighborliness" on the state airwaves, when the interests of listeners and those of the station sat in a delicate balance (Neth; Pederson; Osterud).

Smitten by radio's allegedly beneficial effect on rural family togetherness, Country Life advocates added their voices to the chorus celebrating radio in the countryside. With little evidence to back the claim, they applauded radio for bringing the modern world to the farmers of rural America without the negative centrifugal pull attributed to other recent technologies. "Automobiles and good roads have tended to take farmers away from home," wrote Floyd H. Lynn, secretary of the Farmers Education and Cooperative Union of America:

The radio, on the other hand, tends to keep these same folks at home . . . [it is] a counterinfluence . . . to those influences which have come with mechanical and scientific development and which have had the tendency to eliminate or stifle the social life and identity of rural communities.¹⁶

By this logic, unlike the automobile, radio presented no immediate threat of carrying rural people off the farm to towns and cities in search of new forms of recreation and public leisure. In a sense, it served as a model technology from a Country Life perspective. Radio could educate and entertain without overexciting. It instilled the contentment deemed necessary to keep folks down on the farm. Radio seemingly anchored rural families in place and kept them happy and productive.¹⁷

Radio manufacturers promoted agricultural programming to sweeten their pitches to rural customers. By 1925 advertisements appeared regularly in the Wisconsin Agriculturist touting radio for inculcating country values and promoting family togetherness. Atwater-Kent, another manufacturer, invoked rural tastes when it proclaimed, "There are no songs like the old songs" and recommended purchasing a radio since it "keeps the boys and girls at home." Rural parents feared for the morals of their sons and daughters on summer evenings, but the greatest fear of all may have been the specter of young adults deserting the country for the city.

Set manufacturers and rural radio programmers used overlapping appeals that portrayed radio as a beacon leading the modern farmer, farm woman, and farm family away from the ills of backwardness, inefficiency, and cultural isolation associated with farm life, and toward occupational, social, and cultural fulfillment. "You can make Radiola 20 pay for itself in better crops," declared one advertisement, alluding to the farm programming on WHA and other Midwestern stations. The Radiola 20 became a surrogate of farm extension, since it guaranteed a sound so clear that it was "as though the head of the agricultural college had dropped in for a chat with you personally."¹⁸

The Radiola ad reflected a shift in radio programs under way at WHA and elsewhere. As early as the mid-1920s, WHA programming began to shift away from its role as a neighborly service—a virtual country crossroads for farmers—toward a more aggressive instrument of agricultural extension work. County

agents, the foot soldiers of progressive agricultural reform, began increasingly appearing not on farmers' doorsteps but on their radio sets. These agents had traditionally worked alongside farmers in the countryside, recruiting them for membership in sanctioned cooperative associations such as the Farm Bureau, encouraging rural communities to engage in youth, women's, and community club work, and conducting public relations for the state's agricultural policies (Baker; Neth).

As the novelty of radio wore off and its potential impact and uses grew more evident, the university's Agricultural Extension Division began developing new ideas for rural programming. These explorations brought state radio increasingly into the orbit of technical and organizational agricultural extension work and substantively affected interactions between rural listeners and programmers as the decade wore on. Beyond its spatial reach, radio offered intriguing avenues for continuing and expanding the mission of extension work into farm living rooms and distributing knowledge and expertise from the university's agricultural laboratories and lecture halls.

Aside from traversing spatial divides, radio programs, if skillfully produced, offered an authoritative mode of address considerably more engaging than written circulars or bulletins. At the same time, it was ephemeral and hence less direct than the physical imposition of a county agent drumming up enthusiasm for a program before an audience of exhausted or even hostile farmers. Radio could lengthen the reach of organizational extension work without entirely sacrificing the "human" side of county agent work. Radio no longer served exclusively as a neighborly link, but instead became an electronic supplement to the state's "human" face (the county agent) charged with currying favor with the rural farm family while also instructing it.

In the spring of 1925 C. L. Fluke, a professor of agriculture, contacted county agents across the state to discuss using WHA radio to transmit his agricultural lectures as a supplement to their work. A few exhibited skepticism toward the technology itself: "Yes, I am interested in radio," replied county agent Milton Button from West Bend, "but not to the extent [sic] of separating myself from any cold cash for one."¹⁹ Others such as J. F. Thomas, based in Waukesha, agreed that the idea of agricultural lectures specifically for farmers sounded extremely promising: "I believe the older people will be interested in such talks. . . . I will be glad to ask a number of farmers who have radios, how they like the sort of program mentioned." S. Mathisen of Sheboygan Falls reported that a sizeable radio audience already existed for this kind of programming: "I have spoken to a few in this county who watch and take advantage of things that are broadcasted in which they are especially interested."²⁰

County agents agreed to use their publicity skills to promote WHA program offerings and to provide farmers and county newspapers with advance listings of talks and special features. In late April Professor Fluke inaugurated what would

become a regular feature of agricultural science broadcasts for farmers: appearing behind the microphone to discuss projects in their districts.²¹

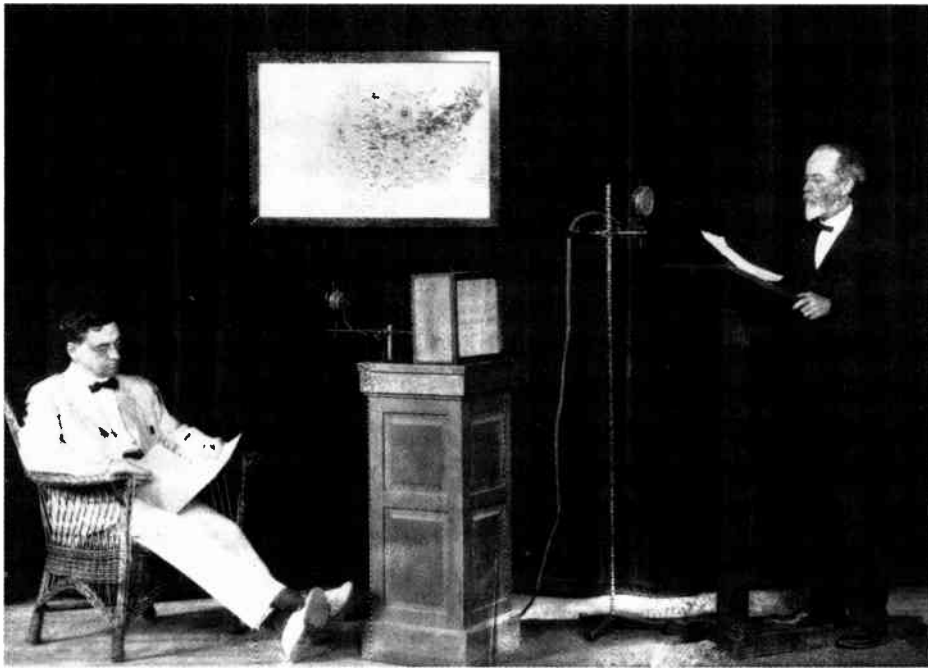
Correspondence indicates that male and female WHA listeners appreciated technical programs from the university. Market news and weather service consistently garnered a warm reception. But the cultural offerings of WHA, in which liberal arts professors addressed farmers, and which were deemed crucial to the cultural dimension of rural radio reform, prompted mixed reactions. A number of male farmers expressed impatience with evening programming that smacked of "education" for its own sake or offered cultural uplift in the form of liberal arts lectures. After an exhausting day of physical labor, many farmers could not muster the enthusiasm or the mental energy for a university lecture.

Some farmers found the educational talk such an affront that they banded together to lodge a collective protest. In a formally worded and carefully typed letter, five residents of Darlington in Lafayette County notified the station of their collective disaffection:

However much we appreciate the efforts of the extension division of the University . . . these lectures have become an absolute nuisance. A lecture weekly would be all right, but we, after our day spent about our business, desire, in the evening, to listen to musical programs, news items, weather, market reports, etc., but your station comes in so strong that no set in Darlington seems to be about to tune you out.

These farmers found WHA's emphasis on "education" and university cultural outreach wearisome and not necessarily reflective of their backgrounds or interests as farmers. It was easy enough to bolt the door when a county agent came to call, but lectures over the radio were harder to avoid by rural listeners. The powerful signal from the WHA transmitter combined with the forceful uplift agenda of the programming appeared to exert an almost overpowering effect on the listener.²²

If some listeners balked at the content of cultural talks, others disliked the way they were delivered. The speaking styles of professors unaccustomed to addressing a lone microphone in a studio took some listeners aback. "Your voice came in last night in good shape," wrote A. N. Kelly of Mineral Point, "but I thought it sounded a little scared." Throat clearing, odd pauses, paper rustling, or even a nervous croak would not have been uncommon from speakers lacking experience and confidence with radio. Lecturers sometimes had difficulty compressing their ideas into the ten to fifteen minutes allotted to each broadcast segment. Speakers rushed to finish on time or ran over into the next segment, much to the consternation of the director in the control room. After one lecture, a puzzled listener from Orangeville, Illinois, wrote to inquire: "Who was the announcer and why was he so 'rattled'?"²³ Some professors simply refused to speak on the air at all and transcribed their remarks for an announcer to deliver.



1921. Professor Earle M. Terry (seated) and professor William H. Lighty of WHA at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Officials used radio as a tool of rural social and cultural uplift. University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives.

Others refused to participate in the Extension Division's plan to make the Wisconsin airwaves a virtual lecture hall for working-class farmers. They defended their hesitance to participate by explaining that radio was "undignified."²⁴

The eclecticism of the nightly WHA offerings may also have contributed to a sense of listener disorientation, especially when juxtaposed with the topical familiarity of the *Farm Show*. While the midday show featured some music with its market and weather forecasts, its strength lay in its clear utility, consistent style, and uniform content. Nighttime broadcasts, however, ranged widely in subject and scope. Following the pioneering work of Professor Fluke in 1925, Monday evenings were devoted to the *Agricultural and Home Economics Program*, and consisted of extension lectures and domestic science themes. Wednesdays featured a mixture of educational lectures in the liberal arts and music, often without a unifying theme.

The rundown for Wednesday, 7 December 1928, is illustrative of the ambitions of cultural programmers to provide serious and uplifting content on these nights and their willingness to present an eclectic and broad definition of programming to serve the rural farmer. The evening began at 7:15 P.M. with "Negro Dialect Readings," featuring Miss Vivian Monk, Department of English, followed by "Psychoanalysis," with Mr. F. G. Mueller of the Department of Psychology.

Programmers then injected a practical segment: "How to Select Wood for Strength," by Mr. L. J. Markwardt, Forest Products Laboratory, at 7:40, before continuing with poetry in "Selections from Masefield" and then "Music by the Haresfoot Orchestra." The evening closed with a short story in Spanish.²⁵ The blend of dialect readings and Masefield, a popular writer known for his colorful colloquialisms, suggests—if not the roots of free-form radio—the balancing act that promoters of liberal arts uplift by radio practiced to keep the average listener engaged.

Fan letters indicate that both male and female rural listeners listened to the *Agricultural and Home Economics Program* and to the Wednesday cultural and liberal arts broadcasts. Although specific cases of listeners objecting to university "experts" lecturing on farming matters do not surface in station correspondence, it is significant that WHA chose to include talks by male farmers as well as agricultural professors as the decade wore on. In December 1927, for example, William Buth of Grafton spoke to his fellow farmers in "How I Obtained the Highest Herd Average in Wisconsin Dairy Improvement Associations." On another night, Otto Onstad of Cambridge presented "Practical Ideas in Tobacco Farming." Perhaps the talks commanded more respect coming from working farmers than from a professor or technician with clean fingernails at the agricultural college. Just as commercial advertising discovered the power of the testimonial to sell products, the extension programmers of WHA relied on the power of local farmers as authoritative subjects. Perhaps farmers appreciated hearing from their own along with the "expert" testimony provided by agricultural college professors in departments such as animal husbandry, agronomy, and horticulture. Other talks promoted the beneficial effects of cultivating affiliations with the agricultural college, such as one by John Perkins, a student, entitled "Why I Am Taking the Course in Agriculture."²⁶

The desire of progressive broadcasters to develop an on-air community linking rural listeners to the university faced some of its greatest challenges and controversies when WHA failed to broadcast an important Wisconsin athletic contest or attempted to schedule lectures or classical music on a game night. Beginning in 1921 WHA began broadcasting basketball games from the university armory. In order to hear Big Ten sports live, listeners willingly suffered the poor sound quality of the remote broadcasts, nighttime reception difficulties, and the distorted shrieks of student announcers, who sometimes screamed into the microphone. As S. B. Robinson of Montello observed after an early broadcast: "You could not tell whether you had a dogfight or a basketball game."²⁷

Historians have noted the critical role of sports broadcasts in consolidating enthusiasm for chain and network radio during the 1920s and 1930s (Barnouw; MacDonald; Smulyan; Douglas). Chain and network broadcasts built national audiences for prizefights, horse races, football games, and the World Series. Sports fandom became one example of radio's "imagined community" spanning geo-

graphical divides and ethnocultural differences. In broadcasting Wisconsin sports to the hinterlands, WHA catalyzed new forms of a local, gendered “radio imaginary” among male farmers.²⁸ Sports broadcasts from Madison provided men with a diversion from farm worries, offered a distinctive service to state fans, and strengthened patterns of rural heterosocial behavior in which men gathered to hear the news at the county crossroads. Farmers headed for their local hardware or village country store on game nights, transforming these public spaces into festive gathering places on evenings when WHA carried Big Ten basketball games. L. Leunenberger, a dealer in general hardware, stoves, and oils in De Forest, wrote on March 26, 1927: “The two games were received and greatly appreciated by the whole crowd that gathers here every game.”²⁹ A similar letter from Donaldson Brothers General Hardware outside of Madison reported that games produced a packed house of between twenty and twenty-five enthusiastic listeners. Turning the culture of expertise represented by extension work on its head, sports fans wrote often to WHA, offering trivia on opposing teams and suggesting stylistic tips for the collegiate play-by-play announcers. Frequently these letters featured multiple signatures—ten or more was not uncommon—as if to bear witness to the grouping effect that occurred as radio audiences congregated throughout the state.

Hearing the university band strike up “On Wisconsin” and the roar of the crowd while gathered around a loudspeaker in a home or country store miles from the nearest paved road or streetlight cannot have failed to delight male farmers. Nighttime sportscasts created a new kind of social event, fostering interaction that complemented, but remained distinct from, local club meetings, cooperative organization events, and church outings where men and women were present. (Congregating around a set provided by a local merchant, who might sell drinks or food during time-outs and between halves, men could cheer on their team in a manner that might not be welcome in the family living room or parlor. In this way WHA furnished a welcome brand of extension service, bringing rural male sports lovers together and promoting ties not over farming techniques or high culture, but over a shared passion for university athletic competitions and manly conversation and companionship.)

On occasions where programmers chose not to broadcast an important game, listeners “talked back” with howls of protest and a blizzard of correspondence. A male farmer from Baraboo wrote: “We were very much disappointed not to receive the game Monday night . . . we hope you will try and arrange those programs so we can hear some basketball as well as farm problems.”³⁰ As an editorial in the *Orfordville Journal* reasoned: “We are all supposed to be boosters for the sports of the University, then why not give us some of the entertainment when there is an opportunity.”³¹

Letters from rural sports fans betray the suspicions and underlying ill will some male farmers harbored toward the university progressive reform community and those in power at WHA. One angry listener accused the state station of

hubris in substituting a university lecturer on a game night. "The world's worst was pulled last night," he fumed.

I think the Professors out there surely have a lot of confidence in themselves when they think they can entertain a radio audience. . . . After listening to the Profs. talk I know why athletic coaches get so much money.³²

The failure of professors to entertain rural listeners challenged their competence as station leaders. It may also have fueled perceptions of second-class citizenship among rural residents. As one listener suggested, more basketball on the radio might ease tensions between farmers and urban dwellers, who were more likely to be able to afford to attend games in Madison: "By doing this you are winning more freinds [sic] and the feeling between the towns people and University will be more mutual as there was sort of a dissatisfied feeling between them on account of the ticket situation."³³

Walter J. Duborg of Fall River hatched an elaborate theory about missed basketball broadcasts on WHA. He believed that a vindictive station management was waging cultural war on sports-loving farmers by deliberately canceling games at the last minute.

The director's voice as he announced the game would not be broadcast was filled with antagonistic satisfaction that he would disappoint the basketball fans. . . . WHA belongs to the people of Wisconsin and not to a few.

In the style of citizens demanding democratic political rights, ten male listeners from Edgerton filed a letter in the form of a petition, demanding complete basketball team coverage on WHA. Music was plentiful on other stations, they argued, but carrying state team sports constituted WHA's *raison d'être* on the airwaves. Farmers implied that loyalty to their state station would be won through the uniquely cathartic diversions of basketball rather than through a classical concert or a lecture on scientific farming.

"Talking back" to the state and the university over the issue of sports on WHA signified more than a mere declaration of passion for Big Ten basketball. Rural listeners wrote to challenge the WHA programming bias toward the effeminate domain of high culture. Joe Dierauer of Cedarburg wrote mockingly:

What does the average fan care about symphanies [sic] and saporanos [sic] on such a night. What we want is to see what our boys can do to Ohio. Why not put such interesting events out on the air instead of hogging all the fun over there. Incidentally, the broadcasting of such event will surely encourage many young lads to attend our own university instead of going over to Michigan or Notre Dame.³⁴

Dierauer conveys an awareness of the Progressive aspirations of WHA programmers to foster listener loyalty and connection to the state of Wisconsin. Failure to respond to Wisconsin citizens' need for sports entertainment risked spurring a defection to Michigan or Notre Dame. Dierauer's letter invoked the worst fear of Country Life activists—that "symphanies" and "saprinos" would not ameliorate but instead exacerbate rural disenchantment to such a level that a generation of virile Badger fans would decamp to Ann Arbor or South Bend, never to return. His argument implied that keeping male listeners rooting by their radios for the home team might help keep their feet planted in the countryside, thus accomplishing one of WHA's chief ambitions.

The way that rural sports radio listeners constituted a politicized community by invoking their state's rights to obtain programs they wanted challenges the standard complaint about the deleterious effects of modern technology on rural patterns of social and cultural organization (Pederson; Barron; Atherton). The case of basketball indicates the way that consumer publics appropriate and use technology, particularly communications technology, for their own needs. WHA radio listening was very much a shared pastime that fostered rather than weakened community social life and, in the particular case of sports broadcasts, became a cause around which farmers joined their voices in organized protest.

Through devices such as multiple signatures and speaking of themselves in terms ranging from "we" to "our boys," rural male sports fans expressed themselves as a unified political constituency. They banded together as the voice of manly rural localism pitted against the state station's effete cultural autocracy. In sharp contrast to the "neighborly" exchanges of the early period of listener expression, these listeners entwined gender and political rights, speaking of the obligations of the state to "young lads." They recognized that WHA represented state and university power, and that their sole recourse in staking a claim to the airwaves required unity and strong arguments.

Rural women expressed listening patterns, tastes, and communicative strategies of "talking back" that contrast noticeably with those of male farmers. For every letter sent by a male listener such as Frank Walter of Fox Lake, who declared the "Shakespeare very fine," or Lyle Cors, membership secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association in Beloit, who found classical music a "welcome interlude to . . . hours of beery baseball broadcasts," there were multiple letters written by female farmers praising WHA's educational lectures and classical concerts.³⁵ Apparently the WHA station policy of favoring the classical music that so incensed C. H. Alsmeyer and left many male sports fans muttering in disgust delighted women on farms. Mrs. A. K. Bassett of Ski-Hi Farm in Baraboo wrote that she and her husband listened to the farm program at noon, but she reserved her warmest congratulations for the classical performances of the university band. Josephine Hadley Pierce of Taycheedah summed up what appealed to her most about WHA: "It is such a relief when nearly every broad-

casting station is blaring jazz to find one station that consistently gives us good music." She went on to request that more university lectures be added to the schedule: "There were so many good things I had to miss in my four years attendance there," she wrote. From the standpoint of women on farms, musical and educational programs cemented their affection for state radio and served the distinct needs of women living in rural circumstances.³⁶

Whereas some male farmers expressed suspicion or hostility toward male professors speaking to them on matters educational and cultural, women on farms who wrote to the station responded quite differently to uplift of this kind. Letters suggest that they found the connection with the university enriching, rather than threatening, and hoped to sustain or strengthen it. Mrs. W. L. Clawson wrote expressing her gratitude to WHA for bringing its educational and cultural resources into her farmhouse, particularly for its benefit on male members of the household: "We are glad to get the farm talk from the university when the men can hear them," she wrote. Another listener added: "[You've] given busy farmers a chance to listen and know of our university activities."³⁷ These women's voices support the idea that while farming could be a lonely occupation for both men and women, the combination of geographical isolation and the housework and child care burdens borne by women produced a sense of longing for, or at least a curiosity about, urban life. While many women, particularly unmarried girls, left the country for the city, extension radio brought news and possibilities of alternative worlds that lay beyond the circumscribed world of female farmers, most of whom were married (Meyerowitz).

In 1925 a short story appeared in *The Farmer's Wife*, a widely circulated mid-western magazine, that embodied some of the vague yearnings WHA's female listeners expressed for a synthesis of farm life and urban culture. "To the Farm by Radio" was a whimsical but suggestive story about the effects of radio on the lives of one rural farm family. "What has radio life done for us?" the narrator, a farm woman, muses. "It has made life over." She proceeds to describe how radio converts a humdrum day on the farm into a blissful experience for the entire family. In the morning radio supplies the intellectually curious woman on the farm with news of the world without requiring that she leave the home or burn the bread. At noon the radio picks up the market news, enabling the rural family not only to compete in the marketplace but to master it. "We know just as much as the elevator men and buyers do and just as soon," declares the narrator. "We know when to hold and when to sell."³⁸

The story extols the civilizing powers of radio upon the rough-hewn farmer sensibility. The paean to radio life reaches its peak when the female narrator walks into the barn to find a miraculous sight: "Daddy milking, with the head piece on and listening to Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*." Beyond its lampoon of the straw-nibbling rural male transformed into a sophisticate, the image reveals a deeper wish on the part of the female heroine for rural life and urban culture to converge.

Radio represents a force to vanquish women's frustrations and anxieties about rural life (isolation, economic impotence, and cultural backwardness) and cure the stereotype that country folk lack sophistication and polish. In the story, radio proves able to bring the best of the city to the farm without disturbing the distinctive charms of country life.³⁹ Even as the tale leaves the narrator happily with her husband and children on the farm, it suggests the power of radio to female farmers, and perhaps to male farmers too, who are holding on to a dream of a life enriched by the excitement and stimulation that only a city can offer.

While WHA radio may not have been able to magically transform the lives of rural Wisconsin women as envisioned in the story, it did in 1926 at last provide a daily program targeted exclusively to their interests. Under the guidance of Professor Edith E. Hoyt of the university's Extension Division, the *Homemaker's Hour* aired on WHA six mornings a week.⁴⁰ Denying the fact that many female farmers worked alongside men in physically demanding settings outside the farmhouse, the program devoted itself to supporting the daily routines of the farm woman, boosting her morale, and (ideally) overcoming whatever jealousies she might have of her city sisters. Across the country, broadcasts emphasized the principles of "domestic science" in the farm household as well as the joys and travails of life as envisioned through the prism of Country Life ideology.

Each day the program featured "Music of the Home," educational talks, and readings. Despite its gendered limitations, women enjoyed the neighborly yet informative tone of the programs and wrote to the program regularly. "I appreciate your 'Homemaker's Hour' so much," began a typical letter from Mrs. D. B. Bennett of DeForest:

May I ask for a copy of "Some Ways of Using the Veg. We Now Have," and would it be possible to get a copy of what the man said about the Philippines? Just heard the ending, and from that I judge it must have been very interesting.⁴¹

The program supplied listeners with a weekly bulletin of program offerings (its mailing list swelled to seven thousand names by the 1930s). It also invited women to obtain university Extension Service circulars on a wide array of topical issues, ranging from health and nutrition to housekeeping tips, recipes, and ideas for games and activities to amuse farm children.⁴²

The scheduling of the *Homemaker's Hour* at midmorning meshed with daily farm rhythms. The program served as a companion that ran during a time of day where men were out of the house and women controlled the radio set. Women on farms might have had to share the party telephone line, but for several hours prior to the *Farm Show*, the radio was all theirs (Jellison; Smulyan). Just as male farmers gathered at the county crossroads stores in the evenings for group listening, female farmers sometimes adjusted their chore schedules in order to listen to morning programs with neighbors or in the company of their local

women's club. Whether listening alone or in groups, however, women on farms found WHA a welcome antidote to their tiring and repetitive tasks. As Anna S. Bang of Mount Horeb eloquently phrased it, "The prosaic task of mending socks became an exalted occupation while listening to Dr. Mills' concert," and Mrs. Rufus Gillette declared, "These programs make mending overalls a pleasure. It is worthwhile to be a farmer's wife in Wisconsin."⁴³ These were not self-conscious testimonials, but letters written spontaneously to the station indicating the kinds of impacts these programs were having on rural women's experience.

It is tempting to speculate on how the *Homemaker's Hour* won rural Wisconsin women's allegiances so successfully that it became the most popular WHA program on the air. In the autumn of 1928 both NBC and CBS networks began producing big-budget home shows of their own, yet WHA's version managed to build and retain a large audience. The CBS *Radio Homemaker's Club*, for example, was a big-budget affair, produced in a three-room studio, featuring a modern kitchen, a salon, and a bedroom/boudoir set. It celebrated the well-equipped, modern domestic environment and focused entirely on domestic science, home design, and cooking. Nevertheless, for all of its flash and modern appliances, it did not eclipse WHA's successes.⁴⁴

One clue that emerges in reviewing WHA program schedules is the range of topics and issues the *Homemaker's Hour* covered. For all of the predictable domestic segments devoted to subjects such as "Timely Hints on Home Meat Canning" or "Individuality in Dress for the Elderly Woman," there were also reports by the Wisconsin Women's Legislative Council and discussions of parent-teacher issues.⁴⁵ It appears that the program expanded the gendered bounds of traditional notions of rural domesticity, serving as a forum for rural Wisconsin women organizing politically on local, state, and national levels.

In 1928 Professor Edith Hoyt, *Homemaker's Hour* chief, received a letter from Theodora Youmans of the Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs seeking information about providing "talks on the air on governmental and political topics" to WHA's female listeners. Professor Hoyt responded positively: "I am sure some arrangement can be made by which radio can be utilized in this desirable and practical way." It appears that even as WHA offered discussions of traditional rural homemaking and folkways, its women's programming sustained a variety of voices and outlooks on women's work and women's place in rural society that may have garnered special listener interest and support.⁴⁶

The 1929 stock market crash and the Depression accelerated rather than clipped WHA's role as an instrument of Progressivism and social reform. In Wisconsin the economic cataclysm prompted a massive expansion of state radio. Buoyed by Progressive Party dominance under Governor Philip La Follette and by the economic infusions of President Roosevelt's New Deal programs, WHA became an ever more active player in state affairs. In ten years (1928-1938) broadcast time increased sixfold, to fifty-four hours per week. Federal works

projects funds supported a massive overhaul of broadcasting facilities, and new studios were built at virtually no cost to the state.¹⁷

In the early 1930s, at the nadir of the Depression, WHA launched a full-scale program of supplementary education aimed at children. The *Wisconsin School of the Air* marked the crowning achievement of electronic cultural intervention, reaching tens of thousands of elementary-school kids in classrooms supplied with radios across the state. Its daily courses covered topics such as classical music appreciation, good citizenship, and club work. To assist youths who had been forced to defer high school or to drop out entirely due to economic hardship, the *Wisconsin College of the Air* was established. For these and other programs, both state and national educational leaders hailed WHA as a sterling example of radio furthering state service.¹⁸

By the 1930s WHA had firmly established itself as a beacon of reform and social outreach. In a decade it had evolved through several stages. WHA began as a niche service provider that focused on offering brief market, weather, and road reports to area farmers. In a few years its novelty status gave way to a phase of neighborly exchange between a growing listenership and a state radio outlet still testing its equipment and defining its reform mission. Programs aimed to appeal to families as well as farmers were added in the evenings. In these years WHA continued to learn about its audience and their interests—who listened and why. Rural listeners, in turn, learned about and often challenged the nature of the state's commitment to building a service relationship between its university and the countryside through radio.

During the mid-1920s WHA's success with its midday and evening programs garnered attention within agricultural extension and Country Life circles. Radio entered the orbit of agricultural technical and organizational extension work as well as cultural uplift programs. The weekly agricultural and domestic science programs, featuring talks from farmers and experts, lecture nights with liberal arts professors, and the introduction of the *Homemaker's Hour* highlight the maturing middle phase. By decade's end WHA broadcast a diverse array of agricultural and domestic science programs and educational and cultural features to educate and modernize rural listeners. The WHA electronic "neighborhood" had transmogrified into a statewide conduit for agricultural extension work and for university-driven cultural interventions designed to encourage rural social uplift.

Listener letters indicate that the transition from a neighborly station identity to a more formal, state-centered one generated mixed reactions in the countryside, especially among male farmers. Many felt uncomfortable with, or at least ill-served by, the educational and high cultural thrust of the station. Often the programs seemed too esoteric or out of step with male farmers' needs. The relentless focus on rural organization and agricultural modernization grew tiresome. As Henry A. Wallace recalled, "Farm papers, county agents, Departments of Agriculture, et al., talking to farmers in terms of this necessity [moderniza-

tion] readily formulated a creed which in effect is 'Great is the God Efficiency and the County Agent is his prophet.'"⁴⁹ In expressing their wishes for "basketball, as well as farm problems," male farmers vented frustrations at the reform agenda of WHA programmers. By the end of the 1920s, what had begun in the spirit of an experimental and neighbor-to-neighbor partnership between broadcasters and listeners was replaced by a formal, at times contested consumer/producer dynamic, in its extreme cases pitting angry listeners (who were also taxpayers) against the state, "talking back" about how WHA should not be controlled by the urban elite "few."

Female farmers responded much more positively to developments in educational and cultural outreach than did their male counterparts. Despite not having a program of their own until 1926, women rewarded WHA's support of classical music and liberal arts lectures by becoming ardent station boosters. Their enthusiasm for the *Homemaker's Hour* made it the most popular WHA offering. It created a forum for women's concerns that transcended the closed confines of the farm household domestic sphere to embrace more worldly concerns. The popularity of this program suggests an area in where progressive reform radio may have achieved its goal (whether intentionally or not) of supporting rural family and social life while enriching ties between female farmers, women connected with the university (such as Edith Hoyt), and society at large.

One of the revelations of WHA listener correspondence is the extent to which male and female listeners supported programs dedicated to improving farming techniques and home economics but split decisively over cultural uplift. Male farmers appeared willing to cede their local authority to scientific techniques promoted by agricultural extension. The agricultural college had been in place for decades, so in a general sense radio carried a familiar message. But men actively resisted radio as a bearer of messages of cultural uplift. At these moments they perceived radio as a cultural interloper—bringing odd musical sounds and ideas associated with effete cosmopolitanism into their lives unbidden. Male farmers championed old-time music and sports broadcasts as manly program alternatives to such uplift. Female farmers showed far greater acceptance of new forms of "rural" culture and supported the cultural programs bringing fresh ideas into their homes. The fact that so many women wrote to WHA asking for *more* of these programs indicates the novelty and importance of radio as a link to a wider world beyond the farm.

Farm women's responses to radio, in particular, raise a central irony of the character of reform radio. Even as it sought to redirect rural work and social patterns to foster productivity and sustain a love for rural living, radio brought tantalizing sounds and ideas from the world beyond the rural fringe. It may also have validated female farmers' desires for wider social horizons than were permissible on most Wisconsin farms. However much *Country Life* advocates argued to the contrary, state agricultural radio may actually have heightened the

attractions of urban life—highlighted in cultural programs such as classical music or thought-provoking lectures about politics—and consequently had the effect of loosening the bonds that tied farm men and women to the land.

The significance of the story of WHA's first decade is threefold. It shows that the specific goals and operations of agricultural extension stations, such as WHA, differentiate them in important ways from other educational, independent, and commercial stations. Rural radio reform combined extension work and Country Life ideology to redefine the techniques of farming as well as rejuvenate and reform rural culture through educational programming and uplift. Second, the responses of rural Americans talking back to urban radio producers reveals the importance of factoring in rural versus urban social and cultural differences in evaluating listener uses of radio. Wisconsin farmers requesting that broadcasts be rescheduled so as not to conflict with their chores, women on farms seeking to expand their horizons by asking for copies of lectures, and groups of male sports lovers petitioning for more Big Ten basketball show the range of needs among rural listeners and their attempts to meet those needs through direct communication with programmers. Finally, the strikingly different responses to uplift among men and women reveal stark gender divisions in rural America in the 1920s. These letters illustrate how radio had the potential to threaten, validate, or alter a listener's sense of self in a decade in which women were achieving new degrees of social, political, and cultural power. One historian of the Country Life movement suggests that its combination of forward-looking efforts to modernize agriculture and a backward-looking perspective on the idealized rural past doomed the movement to failure.⁵⁰ The story told here suggests that WHA attempted to reinvent the "rural" via radio as much as reconstitute it. The veneer of conservatism surrounding progressive reform may distract us from the demonstrated impact of these programs as they raised questions about gender relations in rural Wisconsin. The *Homemaker's Hour* may have reified aspects of "traditional" gender relations, but it also stimulated a forum for discussion of men's and women's place in a new era in which country and city were becoming more closely linked and paradoxically differentiated by technology. Further research of media producer/consumer relationships surrounding radio's introduction into American life will offer scholars a growing base upon which to reconsider Americans' subsequent engagement with network broadcasting and the problematic category of mass culture that emerged in the 1930s.

Notes

1. Correspondence, 21 Feb. 1925; 27 Feb. 1925. University Extension, Educational Communications, WHA Radio and Television (hereafter WHA Papers), 02-4, Box 1. Emphasis in the original.

2. Correspondence, 21 Feb. 1925; 27 Feb. 1925. WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 1.

3. The census defined "rural" as areas of population with fewer than 2,500 persons.

4. J. Galpin, *The Social Anatomy of the Rural Community* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1915), 34. Agricultural Experiment Station at the University of Wisconsin.

5. Van Hise qtd, in Harold McCarty, "WHA, Wisconsin's Radio Pioneer," *The Wisconsin Blue Book* (Madison: Wisconsin Legislative Reference library, 1937). 198.

6. According to the *Variety Radio Directory* 1937-38, there were in 1937 approximately eight stations in operation in Wisconsin whose origins dated to the 1920s. These ranged from low-power stations owned by newspapers in Fond du Lac, Racine, and Sheboygan, established between 1922 and 1924, to stations such as WTMJ in Milwaukee and WISN in Madison, which became affiliates of the National Broadcasting Company in the late twenties, and WKBH in La Crosse, which affiliated with CBS.

7. In 1928 an estimated 63% of radio owners owned manufactured sets. It was noted, however, that crystal and single-tube models were still "in wide use on farms and rural sections." United States. Federal Radio Commission, *Second Annual Report of the Federal Radio Commission* (Washington: GPO, 1928).

8. Correspondence, 16 May 1922, WHA, 02-4, Box 1. The average cost of a good factory set in 1925 based on prices advertised in the *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer* ranged from \$35 to \$90.

9. Correspondence, WHA Papers, Box 1, 02-4. See also Reynold Wik, "The USDA and the Development of Radio," *Agricultural History* 62 (1988): 178.

10. Wisconsin radio statistics by county in US Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, *Crop Reporting Service, Bulletin* 90 (1926-27): 94. The 1930 figure reported in U.S. Bureau of the Census, Abstract of the Fifteenth Census of the United States (Washington: GPO, 1933). Quote from *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer*, 23 Oct. 1926: 19.

11. It is not known precisely how many hours WHA was permitted to broadcast in the early 1920s. In 1928 the Federal Radio Commission permitted WHA to broadcast about eight hours per week and transmit at 750 watts of power. "First Annual Report of the Committee on Radio Broadcasting," Feb. 1939, WHA Papers, 02-5, Box 81.

12. McCarty, "WHA, Wisconsin's Radio Pioneer."

13. Reynold Wik, "The USDA and the Development of Radio," *Agricultural History* 62 (1988): 178; correspondence, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 1.

14. Correspondence, WHA Papers, 02-04, Box 1.

15. "Listener Report Form," WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 3.

16. Quoted in Edmund Brunner, *Radio and the Farmer: A Symposium on the Relation of Radio to Rural Life* (New York: Radio Institute, 1935), 20.

17. Paul Glad observes how village newspapers that bemoaned the effects of the automobile and movie theaters on country life praised the radio for keeping the family together at night. See *War, a New Era, and Depression, 1914-1940*, vol. 5 of *The History of Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), 254.

18. *Wisconsin Agriculturist and Farmer*, 2 Oct. 1926; 11 Dec. 1926; 5 Dec. 1925.

19. Correspondence, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 1.

20. Correspondence, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 2.

21. Clipping, *Red Granite Times*, 22 Jan. 1937. WHA Papers, Scrapbooks, Box 82.

22. Correspondence, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 1.

23. Correspondence, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 2.

24. E. Frost, *Education's Own Stations* (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1971) 466.

25. Broadcast schedules, 1927, 1928, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 81.

26. Clipping, *Beaver Dam Citizen*, 16 Dec. 1927, in WHA Papers, Scrapbook; agricultural radio schedule, Feb. 1928 and May 1928, WHA Papers, 02-5, Box 81.

27. Correspondence, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 2.

28. I borrow the term "radio imaginary" from Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997).

29. Correspondence, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 1.

30. Correspondence, n.d. (1927), WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 3.
31. Clipping, 12 Jan. 1927, WHA Papers, 02-5, Scrapbooks.
32. Correspondence, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 2.
33. Correspondence, 31 Dec. 1928, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 2.
34. Ibid.
35. Correspondence, n.d. and 28 June 1933, WHA Papers, 02-5, Box 32.
36. Correspondence, 17 Jan. 1932, WHA Papers, 02-5, Box 32.
37. Correspondence, 20 Mar. 1927, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 2.
38. "To the Farm by Radio" *The Farmer's Wife*. Dec. 1925: 490.
39. Ibid., 502.
40. WHA preceded both NBC and CBS in creating such a format in the Midwest.
41. Correspondence, 26 Jan. 1928, 21 Feb. 1930, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 2.
42. Statistics on mailing list in "First Annual Report of Committee on Radio Broadcasting, February, 1939," WHA Papers, 02-5, Box 81.
43. Correspondence, 26 Jan. 1928, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 2.
44. *Broadcast Advertising*, Sept. 1930: 5, 18.
45. *Homemaker's Hour* radio program schedules, 1932-33, WHA Papers, 02-5, Box 32.
46. Correspondence, 16 Jan. 1928, 18 Jan. 1928, WHA Papers, 02-4, Box 2.
47. "First Annual Report of the Committee on Radio Broadcasting," 3.
48. Frost, 464-74.
49. Henry A. Wallace, "Standards of Economic Efficiency in Agriculture and Their Compatibility with Social Welfare," *Farm Income and Farm Life: A Symposium of the Social and Economic Factors in Rural Progress*, ed. Dwight Sanderson (New York: American Country Life Association, 1927) 116-17.
50. See William Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America 1900-1920* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1974). 101.

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CHAPTER 5

VOX POP

Network Radio and the Voice of the People

Jason Loviglio

You've been asking for something different in radio, and here it is . . . an unrehearsed program that gives you a cross section of what the average person really knows—and what he thinks about.

*—First network broadcast of Vox Pop,
from Columbus Circle in New York, 7 July 1935*

Introduction

BY 1935 MILLIONS OF AMERICAN RADIO LISTENERS did seem to be responding to “something different in radio.” All across the dial, the untutored voices of average people could be heard matching wits on quiz shows, warbling popular tunes for *Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour*, and piping up from the audience at public forum programs such as *America's Town Meeting of the Air*. As the networks consolidated their dominance over the airwaves and as professional broadcasters—crooners, comedians, commentators, politicians, and pitchmen—mastered forms of address suited to radio's curious blend of interpersonal and mass communication, radio listeners turned to the sound of voices very much like their own.

The popularity and commercial success of audience participation programs during the network era reveals, more clearly than in any other format, the self-consciousness with which network radio and its new mass audience came to think about the role that radio should play in national life. By turning the microphone onto members of the listening audience, these programs made this new national

audience an important part of radio entertainment. Further, audience participation programs accelerated the process by which the new mass audience of radio came to stand in for the nation in general and “the people” in particular.

Radio, together with Hollywood film, Madison Avenue advertising, popular music, and various New Deal arts programs, formed the matrix out of which was born a new mass mediated public sphere in the 1930s (Cohen; Denning; May, *Big Tomorrow*). With laborers, immigrants, and other marginalized groups comprising an unprecedented proportion of the audience of these new mass media, the conflation of this mass audience with “the people” became an irresistible impulse for a wide range of competing interests (Denning; Susman). The struggle over the ideological valence of “the people” shaped the development of the mass media in this dawning era of mass culture and mass politics (Robbins; Susman).

More than any other mass medium, however, radio was well suited to addressing a national public in an immediate and intimate manner. Nowhere was the discourse of “the people” more dramatically exploited than in the national radio broadcasts of the 1930s and 1940s. On many of these talk and interview programs, the voice of the people spoke in performative utterances; like opinion polls, these programs helped to create the publics they simply claimed to represent (Warner).

In the broadcasts of the 1930s images of “the people” abounded. From government-sponsored educational programming such as *Americans All*, *Immigrants All*, and *Freedom’s People* to dramatic programs such as *Columbia Workshop* (which adapted Carl Sandburg’s play *The People, Yes!* for broadcast) and variety programs such as *The Pursuit of Happiness* (which featured Paul Robeson’s famous rendition of “Ballad for Americans”), “the people” was a shibboleth of the New Deal and Popular Front writers and producers working in radio.

At the same time, on amateur hour and countless quiz and human interest shows, the voices of “the people” seemed to articulate complicated and ambivalent meanings as populism, consumerism, and patriotism collided with each other and the production imperatives of live radio. Programs such as *Meet Joe Public*, *Paging John Doe*, *The People’s Platform*, *We the People*, *Americans at Work*, *America’s Most Interesting People*, even *Major Bowes’ Original Amateur Hour* drew an analogy between participatory radio, participatory democracy, and a new culture of consumption.¹ On these programs, “the people” were represented primarily as consumers, as recipients of radio’s magical windfall of free cash and merchandise prizes, and as holders of a common stock of shared knowledge that somehow confirmed their status as “real” Americans.

At the same time, radio fan magazines were encouraging audiences to see themselves as potential broadcasters. In 1933 and 1934 *Radioland* asked its readers, “What Chance would you have in Radio?” and “Will you be one of radio’s future greats?” (Sammis 16; Bisch 18).² Articles on the important role played by fan letters in the lives of radio stars and in the production of pro-

gramming itself echoed this same theme of the central role that listeners' voices played in radio. In 1936 *Radioland* changed its name to *Radio Mirror*, reinforcing the sense that radio's appeal resided in its ability to reflect back to audiences images of themselves.³

More than any other show, *Vox Pop* exemplified network radio's preoccupation with the voices of the "average people" that comprised radio's unprecedented national audience. And throughout the course of its sixteen-year run, its protean and ambivalent uses of the voice of the people also exemplified the "competing populisms" that characterized the emerging mass-mediated public sphere of the 1930s and 1940s (Denning).

Between 1932 and 1948 *Vox Pop* helped to invent a series of compelling but ambivalent figures in mass-mediated public life using a variety of formats. In 1932 the show turned its attention to the "forgotten man in the street." By the mid-1930s *Vox Pop* helped to invent the network quiz show format, posing questions of "spectacular unimportance" to "the men and women who build America." In the war years *Vox Pop* pioneered the traveling human interest and defense program. Searching for "the people" at the intersection of military service and consumerism, *Vox Pop* rewarded "the woman in uniform" for her tricky negotiation of unstable social roles with fabulous merchandise prizes. During its short postwar run *Vox Pop*'s version of "the people" changed again. Reflecting the postwar values of consumerism and conformity, the show became a traveling public relations machine, flacking for Hollywood premieres, corporate celebrations, and other pseudoevents. *Vox Pop*'s longevity, popularity, and protean format make it a good example of changing network strategies for hailing "the people" as a central—and contested—notion in radio and in mass-mediated American life.

What are we to make of *Vox Pop*'s restless search for "the voice of the people"? This process was a complex and vexed one, marked by tensions and conflicts about the nature of this mass-mediated national public, whom it included, whom it excluded, and its relationship to democratic reform and the rise of a postwar culture of consumption and consensus. With its national reach, network radio broadcasting played a pivotal role in circulating the idea that not only was radio the best way to reach the American people, but its programs were national rituals that helped to constitute a revitalized sense of national identity. Network broadcasts featuring the voice of "average Americans" provided a series of compelling performances of who "the American people" were, what they sounded like, and what they believed in.

Audience participation programs such as *Vox Pop* tapped into this process by blurring the line between audience and broadcaster. The changing sounds of the voice of this format over time, and the competing accents and tensions within these voices at any given moment, echoed the larger uncertainty about radio's relationship to public and private life in the 1930s and 1940s.

The strange career of *Vox Pop*—from political interviews with men on city streets during the worst years of the Depression to wartime pageants of consumerism and patriotism—at first appears to follow precisely a trajectory common to many cultural histories of the 1930s: the left populism of a popular form or mass movement becomes co-opted and disarticulated by the increasingly dominant culture industry in league with an increasingly statist national government (Cohen; May, *Big Tomorrow*; McChesney). And indeed, there is an undeniable shift of emphasis away from the leftism of the early New Deal and toward the politics of wartime consensus. It is nearly impossible, after all, to tell the story of radio broadcasting during this period without acknowledging the steadily increasing dominance of the networks and advertising agencies and the government's heavy-handed influence on broadcasting during the war.

But on closer inspection *Vox Pop's* changing representations of the public tell a far more complex story, one that gets to the heart of the contested and contradictory discourse of "the people" in the popular and political culture of twentieth-century America. In its general political trajectory, *Vox Pop's* history is highly ambivalent. Each distinctive phase of the program mixed sharply incompatible definitions of "the people"—in each instance, a rather faithful representation of the larger confusion and debate circulating through popular, political, and scholarly discourses. For example, *Vox Pop's* early fascination with the man in the street combined a New Deal vision of participatory democracy with the "democratic realism" of Walter Lippmann and other intellectuals who saw in the mass audiences of radio, journalism, and politics an irrational and easily fooled mob. As a quiz show, *Vox Pop* retreated from the political potential of average people's voices even as it emphasized the analogy between audience participation and participatory democracy. During the war years, in an attempt to represent an inclusive and unified national defense, the show juxtaposed sharply incompatible ideas about the role that women, African Americans, returning veterans, and other groups should play in national public life.

This ambivalence stems in part from the multiple, overlapping, even contradictory meanings that both public and private can assume in different contexts. Broadcasting via publicly owned, federally regulated airwaves and from privately owned stations to an unlimited number of receivers, most of which were located in the private domestic space of family homes, network radio seemed to offer, in its very structure, particularly difficult challenges to a distinctly bounded public/private binary opposition.

Another source of confusion stems from the conflation of different notions of public in discussions of radio's mass audience. Here the liberal public sphere of political science collides with what Michael Warner has called the "commercial public." The liberal public sphere, according to Habermas and others, achieved its apotheosis in the urban centers of Europe in the eighteenth century

and disintegrated in the twentieth in the wake of welfare state policies and the rise of the commercial mass media. Recent critics have argued that as both a normative ideal and a description of a historical moment, Habermas's public sphere raises serious questions about the criteria governing the inclusions and exclusions that constitute the public sphere's roster of active participants.⁴ Still, the liberal model of a political public based on rational discourse has been hugely influential in our conception of what and whom "the public" means.

The commercial public sphere and the mass subject that it helps to construct emerged at a time when the structural conditions conducive to rational-critical debate, argues Habermas, had begun to deteriorate. Attempts to apply the liberal notion of public discourse to mass-mediated discourse have been frequent despite the inherent contradictions; indeed, Habermas identifies the intimate "talk shows" of radio and television as the epitome of mass culture's "sham public," where the public/private distinction has become hopelessly blurred.

According to Warner and other recent critics, the liberal public sphere's assumption that differences in status could be "bracketed" worked to further marginalize those whose bodies and identities are most easily marked as "different." The mass culture public, on the other hand, offers a "counterutopia," an access to public life that emphasizes rather than denies difference. In other words, in the public of mass culture, difference is assumed, not ignored, and access to publicity is not predicated on the disingenuous notion that the particularities of personal identity and body image—one's race, class, gender, sexuality—have nothing to do with one's public subjectivity.

The merger of political and commercial publics is key to radio's powerful discourse of the people in the 1930s. Radio's installation into both politics and mass culture came at a moment in American history when it was impossible for most observers to see the new medium as an extension purely of one or the other. In order to merge the two into one national public, commercial radio had to accommodate the competing demands of unity and difference, inside and outside. Audience participation programs epitomized the networks' self-conscious efforts to obey (and finesse) the 1934 legislative mandate to "serve the public interest" by tapping into the overlapping and contradictory populisms of the New Deal, the Popular Front, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue.

Audience participation programs proliferated across the radio dial during the 1930s and 1940s because "the average person" had become a compelling figure for network radio's producers and audiences alike. In fact, as cultural historians of the period have pointed out, the popular culture of the 1930s was marked by a profound concern with representations of "the people" (Susman; Denning). Radio's turn to the "voice of the people" was part of a broader set of preoccupations, alignments, and debates about the new media of communication and entertainment and the traditional political and social structures that they were threatening/promising to reform.⁵

Tensions

Trend
 In the mid-'30s the number of programs featuring "the voice of the people" increased dramatically. By 1935 quiz shows, human interest programs, talent contests, and public affairs programs were becoming increasingly popular on local stations as well as on the networks. The first two network quiz shows hit the air in 1934. By the following year there were at least 26 on the national airwaves (Hall). Dozens more followed over the next several years, and within a decade there were more than 250 audience participation programs on the air (Grant).⁶

Comm / mid-30s public serv strategy
 This period also saw the emergence of network-run, "sustaining" (i.e., unsponsored) "public forum" programs designed to fulfill network radio's avowed educational mission and to allay criticisms about the commercial nature of the "American Plan" of broadcasting, which was codified in the Radio Act of 1927 and the Communications Act of 1934. These programs focused on contemporary issues and, to varying degrees, sought to include the voice of the "average American" in public debate. In order to consolidate their ideological hold over this vast new resource, Robert McChesney argues, the networks and other for-profit broadcasters waged a sustained campaign throughout the 1930s to make its programming epitomize service to "the public interest, convenience, and necessity." The turn toward programming that featured the voice of the people, along with other forms of public service broadcasting, can be seen as part of their campaign to prevent any rival definitions of "the public interest" from threatening their advantageous regulatory and market position.⁷

The Forgotten Man in the Street

In 1932 *Vox Pop* helped to invent one of broadcasting's most enduring figures: the man in the street. As part of a broader cultural climate that produced popular images of "the people" as iconic representations of democracy and reform, *Vox Pop* drew heavily on the analogy between the voting polls and the open microphone. *Vox Pop's* origins are inextricably tied up with the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his galvanizing rhetorical invocation of "the forgotten man" as inheritor of a revitalized democratic government and a more unified nation. (Inspired by a 1932 Election Day broadcast in which voters were asked on the air to talk about who they were going to vote for and why, Parks Johnson and Jerry Belcher, two advertising agents in Houston, Texas, developed a show around a "sidewalk interviews" format.⁸

Dangling a microphone on a long wire out of the window of radio station KTRH in downtown Houston, the hosts stopped unsuspecting passersby and peppered them with questions—live, uncensored, and on the air. The show was the first to dedicate its entire format to the voices and opinions of "the people" in such a direct way. With its sense of unrehearsed immediacy, background street noise, and the halting, untutored voices of men in the street, *Vox Pop* captured the feel of an inchoate radio public still acclimating to the national significance

of the new mass medium. The show presented “the voice of the people” as part of the spontaneous, unruly, and heterogeneous sounds of urban life. Posing a dizzying array of questions seemingly designed to measure everything from political orientation to psychological makeup to IQ, *Vox Pop* compiled a weekly clearinghouse of data about an amorphous and mysterious public. Though mysterious, unrehearsed, and urban, the public interviewed by *Vox Pop* was exclusively white, American-born, and, for the most part, male. Women interviewees were asked questions from a different list, one that emphasized private relationships, the differences between the sexes, and domestic chores.

Here is an excerpt from early 1935, right before the show was picked up by NBC. In this excerpt Parks Johnson is interviewing Wilburn Gladsby of Houston, Texas, about the trial of Bruno Hauptmann, kidnapper and murderer of the Lindbergh baby. 125

JB: Mr. Gladsby, from what you’ve read in the papers, have you formed any opinion as to the guilt of Hauptmann in the matter of the murder of the child?

WG: I have.

JB: What’s your opinion?

WG: In my opinion, Hauptmann is guilty.

JB: He’s guilty. Now, why do you say that?

WG: That’s just the idea that I draw from the newspapers.

JB: From the newspapers. Could you give any definite reasons why you have formed that opinion?

WG: Well, from seeing his picture on the [newsreel] screen, he looks like a man that would be capable of such a crime.

JB: In other words you judge him by his looks.

WG: That’s right.

JB: How about the testimony? Would that indicate that he was guilty of murdering the child in your opinion?

WG: Not necessarily, no.⁹

What follows is an increasingly fast-paced series of questions seemingly designed to plumb the political, intellectual, and psychic depths of Wilburn Gladsby, man in the street: “Do you think the soldiers should get their bonus?” “Is a yellow dress still yellow in the dark?” “Describe an elevator to me as if I’d never seen one.”¹⁰

Other interviewees were asked a series of questions like: “What causes love?” “How does it feel to feel important?” “What famous man’s first name is Benito?” “What do you think about section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act, giving labor the right to collective bargaining?” “Who is the forgotten man?” “What’s the first word that comes into your head when I say the following?”¹¹

These interviews also seemed designed to measure the success of local advertising campaigns and the radio public’s receptivity to advertising in gen-

eral. Johnson and Belcher, both admen by trade, asked an enormous amount of market-research-type questions. Some of these questions (word associations, brand name and slogan identifications) sounded much like the standard quiz-show-type questions, designed to test quick thinking and topical knowledge. Other, more open-ended questions such as "Which radio stations do you tune in regularly?" "Name four weekly magazines," and "Do you feel any obligation to the sponsor of a radio program which you enjoy very much?" made more overt appeals for information about the consumer mind.¹²

Equal parts quiz show, opinion poll, market research survey, and psychological examination, the *Vox Pop* interview, taken cumulatively, reflected a world of discontinuous and arbitrary demands. The men interviewed in this manner frequently sounded confused, but good-naturedly so; they were uncertain about the technical and aesthetic requirements of the new medium but free with opinions on just about any topic.

Vox Pop questions reflect, in an appropriately jumbled fashion, the juxtaposition of contradictory ways of thinking about the concept of "the public" then current among radio producers, audiences, academics, politicians, and advertisers. Presented as a stream of non sequiturs, the early *Vox Pop* interview functioned as a kind of aural Rorschach test for both the interviewees and for the listeners at home. What version of "the people" did a given individual hear emerging from this amorphous interrogation? A democratic public? A phantom? An unruly mob? A new market?

On one hand, political questions, particularly those that touched on the legislation and rhetoric of the New Deal, seemed to hail a politically engaged public, a reflection of the New Deal embrace of the forgotten man in the street as the central figure in a politics of democratic reform. Questions such as "Who is the forgotten man?" and "What do you think of child labor?" reflected the new political common sense that mass-mediated public opinion had, to an unprecedented extent, become a crucial part of the momentum behind the New Deal. This political common sense was borne out most famously, of course, in the massive success of Roosevelt's fireside chats. As Roosevelt's own masterful use of radio to chat intimately with "average Americans" had proven within the first week of his presidency, the radio public was an enormously important political actor in the early days of the New Deal.¹³

On the other hand, the show asked questions designed to emphasize the limits of their education and the private and irrational nature of their experience of politics. *Vox Pop* presented these people as confused bystanders to public life, stumbling over questions on arithmetic and current events and judging defendants' guilt by how they look on the newsreels, rather by the merits of the testimony. These voices evoke the "phantom public" made famous by Walter Lippmann and elaborated on by other so-called democratic realists in the 1920s and 1930s (Lippmann; Seidelman). Like the notorious army IQ tests and the

behaviorist and Freudian studies of the effects of propaganda on the irrational mass mind conducted by social and political scientists, the *Vox Pop* interview revealed a public mind overwhelmed by the blooming, buzzing confusion of public life and ruled by essentially private, psychological motivations. The manifest public—the man in the street—was, by itself, inscrutable. Solving the riddle of public opinion required the use of radio, a cultural apparatus that gathered “the people” together into an unprecedented national audience and then gave it a public voice.

These conflicting notions—the public as the arsenal of democratic reform and as a phantom—actually seemed to merge in the notion of the radio audience: immense, immediate, and united, yet also vulnerable, passive, and irrational.¹⁴ *Vox Pop* hailed a public whose shadowy features only began to come clear in its capacity as a “mass audience,” an entity whose suggestibility and accessibility together promised profits and the hope of national renewal.¹⁵ Simultaneously hailing two distinct groups—a rational political public and the irrational audience of mass culture—*Vox Pop* echoed one of the central tensions in radio’s early efforts to carry out its complex and, at times, contradictory, mission of serving the public interest and selling goods. *

The tension between radio’s public service mission and its commercialized, mass audience, Hilmes has shown, was partially resolved in the early 1930s by employing the masculinist liberal logic of distinct gendered spheres. Thus the networks consigned women’s programming—chiefly soap operas—to the daytime hours. Prime time, meanwhile, was reserved for programming that was more prestigious and public (and thus more masculine), such as variety shows and “prestige dramas.” Early audience participation programs such as *Vox Pop*, however, did not always fit neatly into these gendered schedule distinctions. Seeking to give voice to radio’s entire public, and scattered all over the radio schedule, these programs were hybrids, working to represent and contain the contradictory audiences hailed by radio’s national address (Hilmes 151–82).

This tension was exacerbated by the show’s afternoon time slot and its almost exclusive focus on white, American-born men as the voice of the people. Gender
↓ race
While the occasional white woman was asked questions about food, shopping, and child rearing, people of color and recent immigrants were not heard at all.¹⁶ In its efforts to enact its own logic of distinctions based on gender, race, and national difference, this early version of *Vox Pop* hailed a somewhat vexed public: white male citizens cast as an irrational mass-mediated daytime audience, a role typically reserved for women, immigrants, and racial and ethnic “others.”

The show’s humor, suspense, and novelty derived from the inherent incompatibility of “the people” and the increasingly sophisticated means of communication that were enabling them to be reached as a mass audience. Because the producers understood “the public” within the framework of masculinist liberal

theory, however, they were unable to fully exploit the figure of the irrational female consumer or of the ill-educated immigrant “masses.”

Johnson’s approach to the gathering, categorizing, and asking of questions reveals the extent to which this problem shaped the program’s early years. Johnson compiled thousands of questions, each written on a three-by-five index card, organized into categories, each with its own coded markings scribbled at the top of the card. Three wavy lines indicated a “loosen up,” a question designed to get the interviewee and the crowd of onlookers to relax and laugh for the microphone. “Hook . . . trick,” the largest category, consisted of questions designed to catch people off guard, usually with a play on words (for example, “Is it possible for a man to get intoxicated on water?” “Yes, on a boat.” Opinion questions were divided up into “heavy” and “light,” and there were far more of the latter than the former. While “heavy” opinion questions took on issues of class, politics, and the distribution of wealth, questions for women were, in one way or another, of the “hook . . . trick” variety, designed to make them seem silly in stereotypically feminine ways. For example, “Women are usually pleased when referred to as ‘kittenish’ but get fighting mad if they are referred to as ‘catty.’ Is this an example of inconsistency?” The separate category designated “women’s questions” was relatively small, indicating the segregation of women’s opinions from men’s and the general sense that the normative interviewee was a man.¹⁷

However, the man in the street had to be handled properly in order to preserve the tension between the democratic notion of the rational citizen and the irrational (and feminized) “herd” of mass culture. In early interviews Johnson mixed questions from different categories with the precision of a chemist, being careful to start off with a “loosen up,” followed by a “hook . . . trick,” and then perhaps some “general information” questions. In numerous notations made by Johnson on the cards and in his notebooks, he makes it clear how concerned he is to make men comfortable playing the fool. Part of this strategy depended upon the mostly silent figure of the irrational woman, who was the topic of many of the questions posed to the man in the street. The figure of the man in the street as a self-conscious representation of radio’s feminized mass audience proved too awkward as the gendered logic of day and night audiences became increasingly predominant. A new public, a mass-mediated public that embraced these contradictions more gracefully, was required.¹⁸

Quiz Show

The still-new quiz show format was the perfect solution for *Vox Pop*’s dilemma. Like other man-in-the-street programs of the mid-1930s, *Vox Pop* began to ask very different questions of its live, unrehearsed, amateur audience. By the summer of 1935, when NBC brought *Vox Pop* to New York City for a national hookup,

all questions of a political or controversial nature had been banished along with the exclusive focus on men. The show emphasized instead the show's impromptu, unrehearsed encounter with people on the street. Announcer Ben Grauer began each show by promising, "Nothing is planned in advance" and "Nobody knows who will be interviewed, or what will happen, not even the boys themselves."¹⁹ Within weeks of its debut, however, the show fled the noise and unpredictability of the sidewalks for the more respectable environs of hotel lobbies and train stations. Soon after, the show rejected daytime broadcasts for the more lucrative and prestigious evening time slot.

Reinvented as a quiz show, network radio's first to award cash prizes for correct answers, *Vox Pop* turned its attention from the man in the street to a broader, less political conception of "the people." The new version paid homage to "the great American average," a concept increasingly common in ad campaigns, the new science of public opinion polling, and the fireside chats of Roosevelt. The less controversial new format was a non-negotiable demand on the part of Ruthrauff and Ryan, the advertising agency representing Fleischmann's Yeast, the show's first national sponsor.²⁰ Despite the turn away from politics, religion, and "heavy" opinions of any kind, the network version of the show now billed itself grandly as an expression of patriotism, populism, and participatory democracy. The show touted interviewees as "the men and women who make America," a decidedly populist turn of phrase that echoed, however obliquely, the support for organized labor circulating through both the popular and political cultures.²¹

To be more precise, the network version of *Vox Pop* incorporated elements of interview, quiz, and human interest shows, creating a format that gestured both vaguely and insistently toward the centrality of "the people" in the national experience of radio listening. As the workplace roles and consumer habits of the people took center stage and politics receded, the voices of women and the occasional immigrant became audible as part of the chorus of a new mass-mediated public. And while women were still marginalized through a special list of questions concerning domestic matters, the content of their speech—the central issue of *Vox Pop*'s man-in-the-street years—now seemed less important than the sound of their voices. The breezy exchange of questions and answers about matters of little consequence proved the ideal format for showcasing and containing the many voices of the mass-mediated public.

By 1937 *Vox Pop* had begun to focus less on the quiz format and more on interviews with "interesting people." Gone were the men in the street with their ill-informed political opinions, along with the awkward calculus of how many "light" and "heavy" opinion questions to combine with "loosen up" and "hook . . . trick" questions in any given interview. The people on *Vox Pop* were interesting not as citizens anymore but as contestants, that is, consumers of both trivia and of the Fleischmann's Yeast that the sponsor generously provided to them along with a brief word on its beneficial effect on the complexion.



***Vox Pop* hits the streets, hotel lobbies, and train stations of New York City in 1935. Courtesy Library of American Broadcasting.**

“Human interest” programs such as *We the People*, *America’s Most Interesting People*, *Americans at Work*, *America’s Hour*, and *America Calling* proliferated in the mid-1930s (Dunning). Like *Vox Pop*, these programs sounded an apolitical yet populist note, as they combined the themes of pluralism, consumerism, and the American way. Throughout the second half of the 1930s *Vox Pop* presented the people as the protagonists in a treasure hunt for the great American average. The home audience was encouraged to participate in the asking of quiz questions and in the program’s publicized “searches” for bits of Americana. *Vox Pop* conducted searches for cigar store Indians, old-time grist mills, covered bridges, the widest main streets, the smallest towns, and other items symbolic of small-town American life.²²

Increasingly, the program eschewed the elements of risk associated with chance encounters with people on the street for a more polished presentation of “characters” who would perform well before a microphone. In a 1939 memo Nate Tufts, the Ruthrauff and Ryan advertising executive who handled the program for Bromo-Seltzer, urged Johnson to take great care in how representatives of the public were presented on the show. “John Q. Public interviewees . . . should be selected far enough in advance so that we eliminate as far as possible

the chance of 'dud' interviews."²³ In other memoranda from that year, Tufts strongly urged that "the voice of the people" should be heard only "when it seems advisable" rather than every week."²⁴

By 1939 the program, which had begun by boasting of its totally unrehearsed encounters with the public, began to schedule special guest interviews with a new generation of "media-ready" personalities. *Vox Pop* interviewed a New York City doorman who had once been a prize fighter, an eyewitness in a celebrated murder case, the president of the Mother-in-Law's Association of America, and countless other "interesting personalities" that combined ordinariness with a guaranteed human interest value. Other changes quickly followed. Increasingly, celebrities came on to be "Vox Popped," that is, quizzed and interviewed. The show began to travel around the country in the 1940s, setting up microphones at regional celebrations, at local festivals, and on board the Silver Meteor train bound for Washington, DC—part of a developing trend in audience participation shows for remote broadcasts.

War

At the end of 1940, with war looming, *Vox Pop* refashioned its quest for the voice of the people again, part of the networks' dramatic commitment to the war effort. By July 1941 the show had converted to full-time war mobilization, traveling every week between military bases and defense plants, conducting personal interviews with servicemen and women, black and white, of every stripe, and from many backgrounds. The voice of the people, first assumed to reside in the randomness of the people, then in their "averageness," now was sought in the exemplary "Americanness" of those working for the nation's defense. Heard on the Armed Forces Radio Service as well as on network radio, *Vox Pop* became an important link between the home front and soldiers abroad.

In friendly chatter vetted by military censors, the voices of soldiers and sailors took on a quasi-official status. Despite broadcasting's wartime mobilization, and partly because of it, the voices of women occupied an increasingly central but uneasy place in *Vox Pop*'s national public. With the stakes raised, the tensions in *Vox Pop*'s appeal to "the people" became both more important and more difficult to resolve and contain.

During the war years, human interest, documentary, and audience participation styles converged in numerous programs designed to give voice to the men and women in military service and defense work. Many established network programs altered their formats for the duration, traveling nationally and internationally to military camps. These programs hailed a national audience of soldiers, defense workers, and patriotic citizens as equally vital components of Roosevelt's "arsenal of democracy." The conflation of "the people" with those fighting the war was part of the broader political and popular culture of the period. But *Vox*

Pop made this relationship vivid through interviews carefully divided into segments on wartime experiences and on dreams of postwar life. In this format, the patriotic sacrifices of military service were made coherent within the context of the postwar consumerism that would be its eventual reward and rationale.

Under not-too-subtle pressure from the federal government, which brought an antimonopoly suit against them in 1938, the networks agreed to disseminate the messages coming out of the Office of War Information (OWI) and other government agencies. Fearing a repeat of the World War I government takeover of the airwaves or some other incursion into their profitable hold on most of the North American airwaves, the networks worked closely with OWI and other agencies, starting as early as 1940, to create programming sympathetic to administration interests. Most often these programs featured the voices and active participation of soldiers.²⁵

Vox Pop was the first program to turn its attention to the war effort and to the voices of defense workers, soldiers, and servicewomen. Parks Johnson, the father of a marine and a former marine himself, responded as much to his own sense of patriotic duty and his unerring knack for finding commercially compelling formulas for presenting the voice of the people as to government pressure. *Vox Pop's* attention to women in uniform and women defense workers made it a particularly interesting example of this format. Programs such as *American Women* (1943–1944) focused exclusively on the contributions of women to the war effort but tended to be short-lived and not nearly as popular as *Vox Pop*, which soared to its highest Crossley ratings during the war years.²⁶

As the imperatives of defense work and war morale muted traditional exclusions from public life, the voices of *Vox Pop* echoed both those traditional exclusions and the new challenges to them. The private chatter in these interviews frequently generated public uneasiness, as women expressed their desire to work after the war ended and even after they married, as black soldiers and white soldiers shared the microphone, and as the ritualized giving of gifts to those interviewed drove home the relentless desiring that postwar life would entail. Listener mail increased dramatically during these years, as more people weighed in with their hopes for the postwar place of women, returning vets, and African Americans and for the place of their own public voices in the consumer culture permeating the airwaves.

Interviews with servicemen and women concluded with the presentation of lavish merchandise as gifts—another *Vox Pop* innovation. These gifts were carefully chosen by the *Vox Pop* staff after extensive clandestine research into the needs and desires of the guests. Taken together, the prizes doled out during the war years amounted to a catalogue of postwar consumer culture: home appliances, clothing, vacations, even intimate apparel. In the ritualized discussion of wartime service and dreams of postwar life, followed by the presentation of merchandise, the show became increasingly preoccupied with the sound of women's voices.

The following is an excerpt from a 1943 broadcast when *Vox Pop* visited Penn State in recognition of the school's transition to war mobilization. Here host Warren Hull interviews Frances Chandler, who was studying aeronautical engineering in preparation for her work at the Curtiss-Wright defense plant. After a stolid description of the school's war work, Hull pursues more personal information about "Cadette" Chandler:

WH: What's this deal you have with Curtiss-Wright?

FC: Well, we go to school here for ten months and study all the subjects that go with aeronautical engineering and they pay us board and tuition and ten dollars a week.

WH: Well, they sort of keep you on the run, don't they? Pretty busy girl?

FC: Yes, we have eight hours of classes a day. With a little off for lunch.

WH: And homework?

FC: Plenty of it.

WH: Well, how do you girls ever have any dates?

FC: You could be surprised by what a girl can do. (*Laughter, whistles from audience*)

WH: What's the most fun in your course?

FC: Well, I think the shop work is.

WH: Oh, that's right. I heard you have to learn to weld, rivet, and everything else.

FC: Foundry. It's wonderful.

WH: What are you planning to do after the war?

FC: I think I'll keep on with aeronautical engineering. It's a good field.

WH: Well, what does the future Mr. Chandler feel about that?

(*Laughter from audience*)

FC: He agrees with me.

WH: He agrees with you?

FC: Sure.

WH: Ah well, that's good. (You know, Frances, we found out, our own private G-2, that you were going to get the knot tied soon. So Bromo-Seltzer has a surprise for you. We went to the Penn State girls' favorite store, Sklose, and we got you a going-away outfit. A three-piece ensemble of 100% wool imported green and red hounds tooth scotch plaid (that's a mouthful), with a pearly white Joan Kennelly jabot blouse, a smart red felt hat by Dobbs, a stunning purse to match—the latest thing made of plastic. And so you can see what it looks like on, Mr. Sklose sent over a charming young lady to model it for you.)

How do you like that?

FC: Marvelous. (*Cheers, wolf whistles from audience*)

WH: (And France, Frances. And to make you an extra-special bride.

Two pairs of lovely nylon stockings.

FC: (*Screams with delight*) (*Audience gasps, then cheers*.)

FC: Thank you!

WH: Thank you very much and good luck to you. May you live long and prosper and be very very happy. Curtiss-Wright Cadette Frances Chandler.²⁷

Cutting against the grain of the program's scripted interviews, the merchandise giveaways became the most emotionally compelling part of the program, eliciting screams of delight from guests, roars of applause from the live audience, and bags of mail from overwrought listeners. It is hard to convey in print the intensity of emotion conveyed by Chandler's scream, the gasp of the audience, and the general air of celebration that greeted the presentation of the nylons. The eruption of the private voice of consumer desire into the public one of national defense proved a potent combination, giving a dramatic boost to the show's ratings. In the compelling broadcast ritual of the merchandise giveaway, *Vox Pop* celebrated the coming postwar return to consumerism and traditional social roles as an extension of national service.

To drive this point home, GIs and WACs were occasionally married on the air at the end of interviews and showered with presents; one lucky bride was surprised by the appearance of Kate Smith—whose voice epitomized the wartime conflation of patriotism and femininity—as her matron of honor. Male soldiers were rewarded for their service with on-air telephone interviews with prospective employers; women in the service received clothes and home appliances.)

The cultural work accomplished by *Vox Pop*'s embrace of a public sphere organized around shared dreams of consumer goods and marriage at first seems easy to determine. Consumer desires, in the case of Cadette Chandler's new outfit, seemed to reposition the traditional gender roles temporarily destabilized by the exigencies of the war effort. The presentation of the blouse, suit, and nylons, complete with an attractive model to show Chandler how it was done in case she had forgotten, and the approving wolf whistles of the mostly male crowd are dramatic partially because of the powerful social meanings conveyed by this ritual. In her emotional response to the gifts, Chandler is recognizable as a conventionally nubile young woman, an irrational consumer of mass culture, and the privileged subject of radio's national public.

And indeed, there is much to support this reading. The nameless, voiceless fashion model literally stands in for Chandler, fulfilling the traditional role of woman as consumer and sex object. The wolf whistles that attend her appearance and the collective gasp and approving cheers that accompanied the pres-

entation of the nylons to Chandler all function as aural reminders to embody Chandler's untraditional, disembodied voice within the frame of mainstream postwar femininity.

However, the eruption of private desire into national service also meant that the public significance of the personal was up for grabs. Cadette Chandler—speaking proudly of her technical training, fondness for heavy foundry work, and determination to work after her wedding and after the war was over—joined a chorus of wartime voices articulating a complex set of expectations and desires of postwar life. In the context of *Vox Pop's* dramatization of the personal, these voices comprised an unpredictable mass-mediated public. Chandler also challenged the expectations of the show's host, whose wisecrack about “the future Mr. Chandler” hints at the anxious and reactionary posture of postwar masculinity in mass-mediated public life.

Chandler's emotional response to the nylons—she screams—speaks to the intensity of consumer desires and the power of her voice to make those desires public, all of which exceeds the show's ostensible focus on national service, just as Chandler's desire to work outside the home has exceeded the requirements of the war effort. These excesses—extra meanings and sounds—have no place in the above reading, and force our attention back to Chandler's voice and the intense subjectivity she brings to her part in this highly formatted program.

In her essay in this volume, Allison McCracken examines the unique power of women's voices on the radio to elude the typical objectification that film theorists have identified in the masculinist gaze of the camera lens. In particular, she argues that the power of the deviant woman to “undermine postwar norms of gender” resides in her disembodied voice, which can be scary and irritating but also sympathetic and even familiar. The voice of the people, in this case the woman who wants her job and her nylons, her foundry and her husband, her body and her voice—emerges as a public figure to be reckoned with and, thanks to radio's intimate address, to be identified with.

Vox Pop's tightly scripted merger of public and private during the war years proved to be the most popular and, to judge by the quality and quantity of audience mail, most emotionally compelling format of the program's entire run. The home audience responded in record numbers to *Vox Pop's* clever marriage of wartime service and the intimate world of consumer desire. One self-described “tough old geezer” and veteran of the First World War confessed to shedding “real tears” when listening to the presentation of gifts to servicemen and women. It wasn't so much the actual merchandise he found so moving as it was the “dad-gummed snooping into their personal lives to find the one thing that will make them happy.”²⁸

Listeners also wrote in to the show asking for merchandise prizes, being careful to link their requests to the larger mission of the war effort, specifying the need for consumer goods necessary to mend marriages and thus restore the

E.g., fighting spirit of their families. (A woman from Cambridge, Massachusetts, asked for a “sheer black nightie and negligee” on behalf of her sailor husband, whom she followed from one stateside naval base to another, “trying to keep up [his] morale.” Citing her long and intimate acquaintance with *Vox Pop* (“I grew up with your show and the products you sponsored” and “darn it, I feel I know you”) and the importance of maintaining her husband’s spirits, this listener understood perfectly the link between national service, intimate relations, and consumer goods that drove the program during the war years.²⁹)

The show relentlessly mixed private meanings with those relating to national defense, at times making explicit the connection between the emotional life of “the people” and the health of the war effort. The show played on the emotional impact of homecomings, impending weddings, and the optimism with which people talked about their futures. For many listeners, especially those with loved ones fighting, missing, or killed overseas, the show’s blending of intimacy, publicity, and national service made for emotionally compelling radio. Letters poured in from families of soldiers begging to hear their voices when the show traveled to their training camp, barracks, or hospital. Families of soldiers who had been reported missing in action used the program as a kind of broadcast bulletin board for contacting featured servicemen and women who might have some information about what had become of their loved ones.

But this wartime merger of public and private proved to be as controversial as it was popular. As the war dragged on, *Vox Pop*’s dramatic merger of public and private increasingly resulted in the unintended politicization of the personal. Listeners demanded government inquiries into the program’s potentially treasonous breach of secrecy by publicizing facts and opinions that were better kept private. Such breaches included interviews with servicemen focusing on precise details about weaponry, strategy, and casualties. Listeners also objected strenuously to incidents of apparent sympathy for the enemy when interviews lingered too long on the Japanese casualties. Also, incidents of racism were charged in several broadcasts where white soldiers, interviewed live, used racial epithets to describe black soldiers. In response to one such controversy, a Mrs. L. B. O’Neal of Long Island City, New York, wrote:

Please make it a point in the future to rehearse such programs because I believe if such a thing continues there will be a terrific war over here between the white and colored men. . . . “The colored man and woman” will not take in the future what they have suffered in the past.³⁰

Throughout the war years, *Vox Pop* hailed desiring subjects of all sorts as the imperatives of defense work and war morale worked to mute traditional exclusions that were constitutive of the political public sphere. The private chatter of



Vox Pop goes to War, 1943. Courtesy Library of American Broadcasting.

these public interviews became increasingly unruly, as women expressed their desire to work both after the war ended and after they married, as African-American listeners objected sharply to officers' casual use of racial epithets, and as the ritual gift giving drove home the relentless desiring that postwar life would require.

Letters such as the one from O'Neal epitomized the risk of combining live radio and the voices of amateurs, that is, the people. By war's end *Vox Pop* had moved to safer ground, shilling for the corporations, chambers of commerce, and Hollywood film and television industries that would play such a huge role in shaping the culture and politics of the 1950s. (In its final years *Vox Pop* broadcast from the premieres of blockbuster movies, from the sites of regional festivals, and from the campuses of the gigantic automobile plants that were moving into postwar operations.)

But this format lacked both the high sociopolitical stakes of the *Vox Pop* of the war years and the tantalizing big-money prizes of the radio quiz shows that had come to dominate the airwaves in the postwar years. Network radio's preoccupation with the voice of the people became increasingly centered around quiz shows, which presented citizens as consumers of random and disconnected

pieces of information. From the triumph of the wildly successful *Stop the Music*, which bumped legendary comedian Fred Allen off the air in 1948, to the quiz show scandals on television in 1958-59, quiz shows were essentially the only radio broadcasts featuring the voices of average Americans. It wasn't until the 1960s that the radio call-in format slowly began to emerge as the heir to the audience participation impulse. (By the 1970s talk radio had come into its own as Americans began tuning in the voices of average people, mediated by professional "hosts," and talking politics) With the return of untutored voices such as Wilburn Gladsby's to the airwaves, the strange career of the voice of the people had, in some ways, come full circle

For sixteen years, in widely divergent formats, *Vox Pop* exemplified network radio's preoccupation with finding and defining its own national audience and conflating that audience with the nation itself. In the process, *Vox Pop* did much to spark radio's protean preoccupation with the national implications and private motivations of the new mass audiences tuning into the new medium. ~~In the process of redefining radio's public in terms of consumption rather than politics, *Vox Pop's* public lost its democratic-sounding voice but learned to speak in the language of desire, where the personal is sometimes political and always compelling.~~

The preoccupation with the voice of the people continues today on radio, television, and the overtly "interactive" media technologies of more recent vintage. Each new innovation in "reality programming" brings with it another spasm of popular ambivalence as the voices, faces, and bodies of "the people" saturate the media landscape. Perhaps the larger cultural work of this decades-long process has been to make way for a culture where surveillance itself becomes the most popular and economical form of mass entertainment and where public and private denote kinds of performance rather than discrete places.

"m. 1.270"
 "S. 1.270"
 "Fear Factor"
 "The Chair"
 etc.

Notes

1. For a discussion of audience participation radio programs, see Munson, 19-62.
2. The Sammis and Bisch articles from *Radioland* can be found in the Radioland Collection (henceforth RL) at the Library of American Broadcasting (henceforth LAB) at the University of Maryland, College Park.
3. I would like to thank the Library of American Broadcasting for access to their *Radio Mirror* and *Vox Pop* collections. In particular, I would like to thank Chuck Howell, curator, Karen Fishman, assistant curator, and Michael Henry, research assistant.
4. Access to the sphere of rational-critical debate, while ostensibly universal, works in theory and practice to exclude those whose class, gender, and racial identities mark them as "different" and therefore, partial and private rather than public.
5. Denning; May, "Making," *The Big Tomorrow*; Rabinowitz; Susman (particularly "The Culture of the Thirties" and "The People's Fair").
6. Grant. The high-water mark of the quiz format was the postwar, pretelevision era, when hundreds of quiz shows appeared on network and local radio, featuring ever larger cash and

merchandise giveaways. Most of the early quiz shows followed the format established by the first two, *Uncle Jim's Question Bee* and the *Ask-It Basket*: contestants were solicited from a studio audience or from the street and asked questions submitted by the listening audience. Others combined network radio's highbrow and popular impulses, pitting the home audience's questions against a panel of experts. One of the most popular of this kind was *Information Please*, which ran from 1938 to 1948, featuring such guest panelists as Orson Welles, Dorothy Parker, Alfred Hitchcock, Lillian Gish, Carl Sandburg, and H. V. Kaltenborn. *The Answer Man*, which ran from 1937 to 1956, featured Joe Chapman as the lone eponymous expert answering dozens of question every day for nearly twenty years. Listeners provided the questions, sending in as many as twenty-five hundred questions a day and the Answer Man provided the answers, one after the other, in deadpan style. Many of the early quiz shows, such as *Professor Quiz* and *Vox Pop* itself, evolved from a local, man-in-the-street format. Questions designed to gauge public opinion eventually developed into questions that tested the public's knowledge of geography, spelling, history, and trivia. Dunning, 37.

7. The meaning of this regulatory phrase was never more vague than in the context of radio broadcasting, where the identity and interests of its "public" were so hotly contested. Cultural edification, commercial profit, national security, and the often loosely organized interests of various interest groups all advocated for distinctly different versions of "public service." See McChesney.

8. Chuck Howell and Mike Mashon's interview with Bill Johnson, 25 Oct. 1995, *Vox Pop* Collection (henceforth VPC), Series II, Box 3, Folder 72.

9. 11 Jan. 1935 broadcast, VPC, Series III.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.; see also Series I, Subseries 2, Box 1, Folders 22–25, "Interview Questions."

13. Indeed, Roosevelt's timing of the fireside chats to coincide with addresses to Congress, announcements of new administration initiatives, and official proclamations made clear how he intended to use them as a way of enlisting public opinion to support his efforts to influence Congress. See Buhite and Levy.

14. Lawrence Levine has identified a similar ambivalence vis-à-vis "the people" in the Hollywood movies of the period. "Hollywood evinced a pervasive ambivalence concerning the American people who were constantly referred to as the cure and hope of the state but who were depicted again and again as weak, fickle, confused sheep who could be frightened, manipulated, and controlled" (169–95).

15. The cause of the Depression was understood, by some in business and government, to be "a buyer's strike." A return to consumerism, therefore, could return the nation to economic prosperity. See Barnard.

16. I base this assertion not solely on the marginalization of women and minority voices on the very few early *Vox Pop* broadcasts I have actually been able to listen to but also on Parks Johnson's meticulous notebooks, in which he has recorded the name, sex, and some other salient features of each interviewee. It is not until the late 1930s that he makes any record of "Negro" interviewees at all. In his notes on the 11 Jan. 1935 broadcast Johnson writes, "No current events questions for women." And in his collection of interview questions from the network era, Johnson has a separate category marked "women—questions for," which focuses on matters of child rearing, nutrition, the differences between the sexes, and so forth. VPC Series III, Subseries 3, Folder 6, Interview Questions.

17. Ibid.; Series I, Subseries 2, Box 1, Folders 22 and 23, Interview Questions.

18. Ibid.; Series I, Box 2, Folders 1–2, Parks Johnson Notebook #1.

19. Script for 7 July 1935 and 18 Aug. 1935. VPC Series I, Subseries 5, Box 2, Folder 13, scripts—May 6, 1935—November 18, 1935.

20. VPC Series I, Subseries 4, Box 2, Folder 1, Parks Johnson Notebook, #1, 28 June 1935: "At first conference with Reber [head of J. Walter Thompson radio department], he said—'Here are your sponsors—Fleischmann's Yeast . . . here's your spot on the air, between Jack

Benny and Major Bowes . . . Stay off politics and religion and otherwise, run the show to suit yourselves.”

21. VPC Series I, Subseries 5, Box 2, Folder 14, Scripts—January 26, 1936–April 28, 1936.
22. VPC Series I, Subseries 3, Box 1, Folders 31–33, Searches; Series I, Subseries 1, Box 1, Folders 6–8, Listener Correspondence, 1938–1940.
23. Memo from Nate Tufts to Parks Johnson, 31 July 1939, VPC Series 1. Box 20, Folder 34
24. Memo from Nate Tufts to Parks Johnson, 28 Sept. 1939, VPC Series 1. Box 20, Folder 34.
25. Sterling and Kittross 189–92. See also Steele, “The Great Debate,” “Preparing.” See also Hilmes 230–70.
26. *Vox Pop* garnered ratings of 19 or higher during the first three months of 1944. VPC, Series I, Subseries 11, Box 21, Folder 38.
27. 15 Nov. 1943 broadcast. VPC, Series III.
28. Letter from Gordon Hines, dated 23 Feb. 1942, VPC, Series 1, Subseries 1, Box 1, Folder 10.
29. Letter from Mrs. Margaret Miller, dated 17 Apr. 1945, VPC, Series 1, Subseries 1, Box 1, Folder 13.
30. Letter from Mrs. L. B. O’ Neal dated 14 Aug. 1945, VPC, Series I, Box 21, Folder 29.

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CHAPTER 6**MAN OF THE HOUR****Walter A. Maier and Religion by Radio on the
*Lutheran Hour***

Tona Hangen

A REMARKABLE AND UNLIKELY SUCCESS STORY in radio history is that of Walter A. Maier, a professor, prolific author, magazine editor, Lutheran pastor, and widely sought-after public speaker who parlayed his considerable gift for preaching and fund-raising into a hugely popular religious broadcast, the *Lutheran Hour*.¹ Maier started the program in 1930 and oversaw its growth on both US and international radio into the world's largest broadcast and one of the longest-running radio programs. Initially shut out of free network airtime, the *Lutheran Hour* came to exemplify the best of commercial religious broadcasting. A fundamentalist with a mission to be a "modern Jeremiah," Maier set the standard against which most other radio evangelists were measured. He was the most-heard preacher of his century, addressing up to two-thirds of a billion people each year (Paul Maier 385–88), and among the people he inspired to take up their own careers in religious broadcasting was Billy Graham. By the late 1980s the *Lutheran Hour* was the top syndicated weekly radio program in the United States. In contrast to short-lived, controversial, or flash-in-the-pan religious programming, the *Lutheran Hour* was the radio equivalent of the tortoise in the fabled race against the hare. An exploration of the historical significance conferred by the program's consistent message, financial accountability, and familiar sound—in short, an explanation of the program's staying power in such a volatile industry—is long overdue.

If the widespread stereotype held that fundamentalist radio preachers were uneducated rural rubes, Walter A. Maier deviated from the stereotype in every way.

He was incredibly well educated and a talented professor of Old Testament at Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Joining the faculty in 1922, Maier gained a reputation as a tough professor known for intellectual rigor and scholarship in sometimes-arcane ancient history, making him perhaps an unlikely candidate for success in radio preaching. Most other popular radio preachers in the 1920s were self-taught tent revivalists (Aimee Semple McPherson or R. R. Brown, for example) or small-town pastors or ministers. Although his dense lectures and the difficulty of his courses were legendary at Concordia, very little of this pedantic demeanor carried over into his delivery on radio. *Lutheran Hour* sermons occasionally delved into the historical background or critical interpretation of a particular passage of scripture, but they were primarily concerned with contemporary issues and the importance of personal salvation. He had two public personas: the demanding professor of highly specialized biblical knowledge, and the broadly popular speaker relating the Christian gospel to everyday modern life in mid-twentieth-century America. His stellar educational background, unusual even among seminary faculty, made Maier utterly unique among media preachers.

Raised in South Boston by German immigrant parents, Walter Arthur Maier was born in 1893. He attended Concordia Collegiate Institute, a German Lutheran academy in Westchester County, New York, graduating in 1912 at the top of his class. He received a BA from Boston University in 1913 and went on to theological study at Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis, working his way through seminary by selling typewriters. Returning to Boston, Maier earned an MA in Semitic language, literature, and history from Harvard in 1920 and continued work on his doctoral dissertation while serving as pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Boston, as an army chaplain at nearby Fort Devens, and as pastor to World War I German POWs held in Massachusetts. In his graduate studies, Maier excelled in ancient languages, including Hebrew, Arabic, Hittite, Assyrian, and Babylonian cuneiform writing; his dissertation discussed slavery in the first Babylonian dynasty. He became only the twentieth person to receive a doctorate from Harvard in Semitics, which he earned in 1929, demonstrating proficiency in translation, knowledge of ancient literature, archaeology, law, and religion.

Maier was drawn into Lutheran leadership in the 1920s as national executive secretary of the Walther League, his denomination's youth organization, and editor of its monthly publication, *The Messenger*. Through this work he met Huldah Eickhoff, an Indianapolis-born student at the University of Wisconsin, who was a rising star in the Walther League organization. They were married in 1924, and Maier joined the staff of Concordia as a professor of Hebrew and Old Testament. He was a popular traveling speaker and also served as summer dean of a Lutheran family resort in the Poconos, Lutherland, in the thirties (Paul Maier 98). Huldah Maier remained active in church affairs, leading the drive for

a Lutheran women's auxiliary, editing Walter's sermons, organizing a full schedule of social engagements, speaking to women's groups, and, later, hosting her own radio program, *For Heart and Hearth* (Paul Maier 146; Pankow and Pankow 50). The couple had two sons: Walter junior born in 1925, and Paul Luther, born in 1929.

Both Walter and Huldah Maier were charismatic individuals. Gregarious, fun-loving Walter was a man of gigantic, restless energy, percolating projects and new schemes all the time (Paul Maier 252). His handshake, wrote Hartzell Spence in a *Saturday Evening Post* article, "is monumental. He takes your hand in an iron grip with the sweeping motion employed in Indian wrestling, and follows through with a yank and twist that nearly pulls you from your feet." Huldah was herself a "rapid talker," with a "friendly and disarming disposition" (Spence 91-92). Although Maier made a lifelong career out of meeting and speaking to people of all kinds and his fame brought total strangers to the couple's doorstep on a regular basis, he was personally unassuming, with "pronounced" modesty and a tendency to divert conversation away from himself.

The Maiers belonged to the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church (abbreviated LCMS), the single largest Lutheran church in America and the only mainline Protestant church still led by a fundamentalist majority after the intense controversy over modernism in the early 1920s. The denomination had an active laymen's league, founded in 1917, that raised funds to provide pensions for pastors' widows and church workers. The Lutheran Laymen's League (LLL) funded other worthy projects to fulfill its motto, "Bringing Christ to the Nations—and the Nations to the Church," drawing on an endowment of about \$2.7 million. Two of those projects were a radio station on the grounds of the denomination's new seminary in Clayton, Missouri, and the *Lutheran Hour* radio program.

Just two years after KDKA Pittsburgh began broadcasting religious services, Missouri Synod Lutherans found much to criticize on radio. As they saw it, not only were the airwaves crowded with programs that were frivolous or downright sinful, but what passed for religious broadcasting was bloated with error. A station of their own, thought some at Concordia Seminary, could extend the reach of their missionary efforts and spread truth "by broadcasting, over and against the error, deception, and unbelief that was daily broadcast throughout the country" (Hohenstein, "History" 666). Maier argued persuasively for a station and for its funding by the LLL and the Walther League. In December 1924 St. Louis station KFUEO began broadcasting with a small transmitter installed in the attic of Concordia Seminary. The "studio" consisted of an attic room twelve feet on each side and filled with students' trunks, reputedly sweltering hot in the summer, lacking soundproofing or any other amenities. Maier took on two weekly radio shows in the station's initial season: Sunday Vespers and *Views on the News*, featuring his own commentary on the week's major stories (Paul Maier 72).

In 1925 KFUE hired a station director, Herman Hohenstein, and improved its facilities with a new studio and 1,000-watt transmitter, built with LLL money and dedicated in 1927. By then KFUE (for "Keep Forward Upward Onward") offered thirty hours of programming a week, including a simulcast of local Lutheran Sunday services. KFUE was one of the few church-owned stations to survive under the new regulations imposed by the Radio Act of 1927, although it was not a full-time station; until 1939 the station shared time and frequency with station KSD, owned by the *St. Louis Times-Dispatch* and the local outlet for the NBC Red network.²

The denomination's enthusiasm for radio is evident in the station's newsletter during these years. In 1930 Hohenstein noted that radio ownership had surpassed nine million, approaching the day when

practically every American family will own a radio instrument. This is a field white unto the harvest. Realizing the tremendous possibilities of radio in the future, the Radio Committee of KFUE, filled with faith and courage, is laying aggressive plans for the future. KFUE must lift up its voice with ever-increasing strength and attractiveness, so that more and more people will daily be induced to tune in on our programs and, through the Gospel they hear proclaimed, be saved. (Hohenstein, "Forward" 18)

Since KFUE was a fully licensed station, Maier and Hohenstein needed to walk a fine line between their stated goal, "proclaiming Christ as the only hope of lost mankind,"³ and their obligation to demonstrate to those outside the denomination that the station was not the proselytizing tool of a single religious group. In reality, the station was little more than a Lutheran outlet with the addition of news and classical music programming to round out its roster (Federal Communications Commission 1). KFUE could, as Maier put it in 1930, "serve as a corrective by offering conservative and fundamental Christianity and counteracting the systematic denial of modern skepticism" (Maier, "Radio" 21). It also stayed on the air without commercial programming or advertising, thanks to a vigorous fund-raising effort by the LLL in which every donation was called a "splendid investment in souls, for by means of it many blood-bought souls will be brought to Christ."⁴ The lack of advertising on KFUE earned the gratitude of one woman, a self-described "shut-in," who praised KFUE programming, "free from breakfast-food and soap-wrapper baiting," as a "credit to the Middle West" (*Gospel Voice* 3).

KFUE managed to survive the tendency of the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) to reallocate religious stations to lower frequencies or less desirable hours by classifying them as "propaganda" stations. Successfully resisting a challenge by KSD in the late thirties, KFUE went to 5,000 watts (although at a different frequency from KSD) in 1941, and added FM in 1948 (Neeb 407-11). By the

mid-forties only about a dozen religious stations were still on the air in the United States, KFUE among them. As Robert McChesney has argued, nonprofit station owners of all kinds were the new losers in the post-Radio Act industry, as the FRC favored commercial operators over educational, labor, and religious ones. Between 1927 and 1935 stridently dogmatic religious programming migrated to the remaining religious stations, while networks adopted noncontroversial “broad truths” religious programming, often in sustaining time-sharing arrangements such as NBC’s *Pulpit of the Air*, to fulfill the “public interest” requirements of license renewal (Hoover and Warner 17).

To redress the lack of mainstream network airtime for fundamentalist preaching, Maier and the LLL decided to enter the fray with a commercial—that is, paid-time—broadcast. In 1929, while discussing Christian broadcasting on the Lutherland veranda with Herman Gihring, an RCA radio engineer, Maier was encouraged to consider a national network radio program. He shopped the idea to NBC in New York, but was unsatisfied with their offer of a two-month share of the time slot occupied by the Federal Council of Churches. To Maier, the Federal Council was a hotbed of modernism, riddled with more error than could be corrected in only two months. CBS offered him a contract for a half-hour slot at full market rate, then \$4,500 per episode. As this was far beyond the reach of KFUE’s own Radio Committee, Maier approached the LLL with a proposal that the league sponsor the program. To take on such a commitment, opined the LLL’s *Bulletin*, was the “boldest undertaking ever conceived by a body of American Lutherans” (Pankow and Pankow 41).

The first broadcast of the *Lutheran Hour* was Thursday, 2 October 1930, originating from the studios of Cleveland’s WHK, with the Cleveland Bach Chorus providing the music. Thereafter most of the programs were broadcast live from KFUE St. Louis, although sometimes from other cities, at the propitious time slot of 10:00 P.M., immediately following the network’s hit show *The Shadow*. Response was impressive and largely enthusiastic. CBS initially limited Maier’s sermon, the heart of the half-hour program, to fifteen minutes; eventually Maier got nineteen minutes, in part because of fan mail complaints that the messages were too short. “After the first few broadcasts,” writes Maier’s son in his biography,

well over 15,000 communications had been received [at LLL headquarters], not including thousands sent directly to local stations or CBS in New York. Radio officials were surprised at the immediacy of the response, which they thought would build up only through months of broadcasting. Soon the listening audience was estimated at five million hearers, and after just two months on the air, network newcomer Maier was receiving more mail than such top secular shows as *Amos 'n' Andy*, or any other religious program in America. (Paul Maier 119)

In 1931 CBS brought its policy on religious broadcasting into line with NBC's, prohibiting the sale of airtime for religious messages and limiting them to Sundays. The money was gone anyway; the first season had cost \$250,000, and Maier folded the program after thirty-six weeks. Although listeners had contributed \$2,000 a week and the LLL had provided the rest, the program seemed destined to collapse under financial pressures during the early years of the Depression. Maier hoped that this would not be the end of the *Lutheran Hour*, and he was buoyed by the fifty-seven thousand pieces of mail received—more than was received by *all* the programs sponsored by the Federal Council of Churches on NBC's *Pulpit of the Air* (Paul Maier 125). But that hope waited for four years. Maier went back to his classroom, honed his skills as a public speaker with numerous engagements out on the road, wrote a best-selling marriage advice book, and waited for another opportunity to take up radio.

That chance came in 1935. A Detroit Lutheran pastor, Adam Fahling, had his own program, the *Lutheran Hour of Faith and Fellowship*, for which he had strung together seven stations into a "network," with WXYZ Detroit as its center and superstation WLW Cleveland at its terminus. Both stations were affiliates of the new Mutual Broadcasting System. Maier had been a guest speaker on Fahling's show in 1932 and 1933, and this "mini-network," with its link to Mutual, seemed a good place to reestablish Maier's *Lutheran Hour*. This second incarnation of the program was underwritten by the soon-to-be president of General Motors, William Knudsen, a Lutheran who was interested in the project. Out of deference to the wealthy donor, Maier broadcast the second series from Knudsen's own church, Epiphany Lutheran in Detroit. This meant Maier took round-trip train rides from St. Louis to Detroit every weekend, often arriving back at Concordia just minutes before his first Monday morning lecture. The announcer for the Detroit broadcasts was actor Bruce Beemer, better known for his other radio appearances as the Lone Ranger (Paul Maier 164–66).

Once the program became self-sustaining through listener donations and LLL funds, Maier moved it back to KFUE facilities on Concordia campus, and for nearly the next two decades, utilizing seminary musicians and choirs, the *Lutheran Hour* became a Mutual fixture. The new network's listening area covered 75% of the nation, 80% of the Lutheran population (Pankow and Pankow 51). To accommodate time differences across the nation, Maier and the musical staff produced two separate live broadcasts every Sunday from the KFUE studios at Concordia and pioneered the use of recorded transcription disks starting in 1939. Between 1935 and 1939 the program was not available on stations in the deep South or the intermountain West. Its phenomenal growth (see Table 1) can be traced to the growth of the Mutual network itself and to the program's being heard in parts of the country where there were concentrations of Lutherans to lend financial support.

In 1935 Maier hired a talented seminary graduate, Eugene "Rudy" Bertermann, to help answer the thousands of letters arriving at the *Lutheran*

Hour. Rudy became the program's business manager and Maier's right hand; he married one of Maier's secretaries and stayed on the *Lutheran Hour* staff until 1959. Bertermann went on to direct the television department for the synod, head the LLL, and serve the longest term of any president of the National Religious Broadcasters, from 1957 to 1975 (Ward 227).

The fifteen years after bringing the *Lutheran Hour* across the nation on Mutual were ones of growth and expansion for the program. In 1940 influential South American radio broadcaster Clarence Jones invited Maier to place English- and Spanish-language versions of the hour on his powerful station HCJB in Quito, Ecuador (Neely; Pankow and Pankow 60). Dr. Andrew Melendez, a native Puerto Rican and graduate of Concordia Seminary, was the speaker for the Spanish-language version from 1940 to 1972. Shortwave broadcasting in the Philippines was added in 1939, reaching Australia and China. International broadcasting benefited from some ecumenical cooperation; sixteen out of the seventeen Roman Catholic stations in the Philippines, for example, aired the *Lutheran Hour* in the late 1940s (Pankow and Pankow 97). By 1953 the *Lutheran Hour* was being broadcast in twelve languages in more than fifty countries around the world (Paul Maier 393; Pankow and Pankow 76).

As Table 1 shows, audiences were estimated at twelve million in 1944 and twenty million by 1948; these numbers are extrapolated from the numbers of letters received and, later, from Hooper-rating data for certain US markets (see Paul Maier 303–5). Many of these listeners, of course, were outside the United States—nearly half (46%) of the stations on which the *Lutheran Hour* was heard were beyond the borders of the US in the 1948–49 season. Still, it is safe to say that the *Lutheran Hour* was a household name in the United States and the biggest commercial religious venture on radio—in all, a noteworthy achievement for a small laymen's organization (the LLL's peak membership, in 1973, was just under 160,000) within a small denomination (the LCMS had about 1.5 million members, or about 1% of the population of the United States) (Paul Maier 192–93).

Although missionary outreach was a stated goal of the program, the *Lutheran Hour* was not purely a missionary tool for the LCMS denomination. Maier rarely mentioned his denomination's name and referred to Martin Luther hardly at all, or indirectly as “the great reformer of the Church” (e.g., Maier “What”). The program's policy was not to convert those who were members of another Christian faith, but rather to awaken those who had no church and to strengthen people in their own chosen denomination.

However, no listener could mistake the program for anything but an all-out evangelistic effort to persuade listeners to adopt the Christian faith posthaste. Maier held to what one journalist called “stern, unyielding, absolutely fundamentalist doctrine.” Describing Maier's conduct in the recording studio, the *Saturday Evening Post's* Hartzell Spence wrote that “the microphone becomes his audience, and to it he delivers his discourse, pointing his finger at it in stern warning, rais-

Table 1 • Growth of the Lutheran Hour, 1930–19505

SEASON	YEAR	TOTAL STATIONS	MAIL RECEIVED	NOTES
1	1930–31	36	57,000	CBS network
2	1935	11	16,000	
3	1935–36	10	70,000	Seasons from Oct.-Apr.
4	1936–37	31	90,000	Two separate live broadcasts
5	1937–38	62	125,000	
6	1938–39	66	140,000	
7	1939–40	171 (159 US)	176,508	Transcriptions and foreign
8	1940–41	374 (310 US)	200,000	
9	1941–42	346	260,000	
10	1942–43	450	330,000	Year-round broadcasts
11	1943–44	540	335,000	Audience est. 12 million
12	1944–45	609	340,000	Audience est. 15 million
13	1945–46	809	403,367	Second live broadcast ends
14	1946–47	905	400,000	
15	1947–48	1,022	410,000	Audience est. 20 million
16	1948–49	1,100 (598 US)	450,000	
17	1949–50	1,236	over 500,000	Also on ABC; two sermons

ing clenched fists toward it as he calls for penitence and spiritual rebirth, shaking his head at it intensely, as though it were the most miserable of sinners. . . . There is no doubt that he means you, not some other fellow” (Spence 88).

Believing that religion could and should speak to the full range of modern experience, Maier constantly related scripture to what he saw as the perils of contemporary life. To him, as to many Americans, the twenties and thirties were decades of moral decline, rising sinfulness, and the breakdown of traditional societal moorings. Maier maintained voluminous files of newspaper clippings to illustrate the depths to which American life had sunk. Most of his sermons introduced some terrible current evil, such as birth control, immorality, dishonesty, greed, or decline of family values, and then discussed the cure: a return to Christ and His church. Maier deeply believed that “while the technique, illustrations, idiom, style, application, and communication of [the gospel’s] preaching must be modernized, the essential truths remain constant” (Paul Maier 96).

A typical example of Maier’s *Lutheran Hour* exhortation cannot convey in print the vocal gymnastics, nor the scene as Maier addressed the microphone in his undershirt and trousers, shedding his coat, tie, and shirt before going on the air. But a sampling can give a sense of his detail-laden, memorable style. In 1932 Maier defended the American Christian family against

cutthroat attacks that ridicule every one of Christ’s teachings concerning the home, which are fostered by atheism and communism, applauded by radical sociologists and psychologists, endorsed on many a campus, and, may God forgive us, from many a pulpit . . . With mod-

ern fiction blotched by lechery, modern magazines systematically featuring the descent of morals, motion pictures glorifying unfaithfulness, modern fashions deliberately advertising seduction, nightclubs starring lewdness and perversion, the harvest of this vileness yields domestic deceit, unfaithfulness, and moral debauchery.⁶

Even so, Maier's views were more moderate than those of many other conservative Christians of his time; as in the above tirade, films, mass media, and fiction were evil not in and of themselves but because of wicked *content*. He encouraged listeners to make discerning choices among the many diversions available to them; he and his own family habitually listened to the *Jack Benny Show* during their Sunday family supper (Paul Maier 373). His theology tended toward the conservative end of the American spectrum, speaking up for "fundamentals" of the Protestant faith such as the divine birth and deity of Christ, atonement and resurrection, and especially justification by faith. But he scorned as "disregard of Bible truth" apocalyptic predictions that set the date for the end of the world (Maier, "Airwaves" 176). He was a strong advocate of church-state separation and called the campaign to reinstate compulsory Bible reading in public school "well-meant, yet nevertheless un-American" (Paul Maier 129), setting him further apart from the agenda of conservative Christians in the twenties.

The LCMS was the sole remaining major Protestant denomination not divided by what has been commonly called the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the twenties, as it retained fundamentalist majority leadership. The controversy itself took on new terms in the late forties and fifties, with "neo-orthodox" liberals and "new evangelical" conservatives, and with debate characterized by less rancor in the middle of the spectrum—where Maier found a comfortable niche. From midcentury on, as is obvious to any salient observer in America today, evangelical and conservative ("born-again") Protestants gained tremendous cultural ground, new converts, and revitalized energy (Finke and Stark; Lotz; Jacobsen and Trollinger). His son argues that Maier's contribution to the power shift from liberal to evangelical Protestantism was to make orthodoxy palatable through "intellectual respectability," untouchable academic credentials, and uncompromising defense of the core doctrines of Protestantism (Paul Maier 214–15).

However, the relative moderation of Maier's approach was a subtlety lost on many listeners, some of whom took the time to write to him. Signing himself "A Russian tired of seeing his country panned by all the bellowing pithecanthropus preachers," one Washington, DC, listener told Maier, "[Y]our yokel diction and your fire and brimstone elocution were of a piece with your asinine dogmatism." Another letter writer petitioned Maier, "[D]o you use the same sermon every Sunday? Always, the blood, the blood."⁷

Critics' comments on the program's sameness may have been inevitable, simply due to its long run. In 1947 the program towered over its competitors,

Old Fashioned Revival Hour, *Young People's Church of the Air*, and *Voice of Prophecy*, by any measure.⁸ At the end of the decade Maier had been on the air nearly continuously for twenty years, with a commercially successful formula. The *Lutheran Hour*, as the largest paid-time religious broadcast (and, incidentally, one with a laudable extant collection of financial records), offers radio historians a glimpse into how commercial religion was bankrolled on network radio at market rates. Fundamentalist radio occupied a liminal position between commercial and non-commercial concerns—that is, buying time at market rates with the donations of a listening audience, yet being something other than a corporate-sponsored program designed to sell a product.

As has already been discussed, the LLL financed part of the program's costs out of its endowment fund, served as a funnel for direct donations, and helped the program locate interested private donors. Some of the latter, such as the Baltimore pickle magnate Charles Lang, gifted as much as \$10,000 for the *Lutheran Hour*.⁹ Others, like Mrs. Arnold Kiehn in 1942, sent a portion of her monthly tithe to the *Lutheran Hour* instead of placing it in her local church's collection plate.¹⁰ In the late 1940s solicited income to the LLL was in the range of \$35,000 a month, with an additional \$16,000 to \$18,000 from unsolicited fan mail.¹¹ In 1948–49 the LLL paid over \$625,000 for US broadcasting fees and \$353,000 for foreign transcription and shortwave broadcasts. Income to the program was close to \$1.25 million between June 1948 and April 1949 (although the program was running a deficit of nearly \$140,000).¹²

The *Hour* staff maintained an active mass mailing program and kept meticulous records of mail received and the addresses of its donors. For even a single dollar (which *Lutheran Hour* literature claimed could send the program to fifteen hundred listeners), donors received a graciously worded personal letter thanking them for “the substantial aid you have given us in our work of bringing Christ to the nations.”¹³ They would be added to the mailing list, which reached 325,000 in 1948. Each radio station carrying the program also received mailings and a publicity kit from the *Hour* offices.¹⁴

Some Lutheran League members became “keymen” for the program, serving as local contacts across the country. According to a manual published in 1944, *Lutheran Hour* keymen were encouraged to pray for the program, publicize it in a myriad of ways (the manual included sample posters suitable for mounting on billboards, displaying in empty shop windows, and attaching to the sides of city buses), and do what they could to increase the listening audience—partly out of concern for ratings, now that Hooper and Crossley ratings were being used by networks to measure program popularity. Keymen should also develop personal contacts with their local station managers who carried the program and to write to them “at regular intervals” to assure stations that there were eager local listeners. “More than you realize,” the manual recommended,

the station manager arranges his broadcast schedule to meet the desire of his listening audience, as he has come to know it through his mail and other contacts. Unless you write from time to time, he will have no proof that listeners want to continue hearing our broadcast.¹⁵

Should the manager prove recalcitrant or the continuation of the program on that station become questionable, keymen helped mobilize listeners to flood a station with thousands of “bona fide communications, written in the listener’s own words.”

In addition to keymen, a group of pastors were recruited as regional “field representatives” for the program to meet with pastors, groups, station managers, and potential donors to help raise the \$27,000 needed weekly to keep the program running. The league produced a film, *Into All the World*, designed to be shown to Lutheran groups by representatives in their quest for donations.¹⁶

A large network of affiliated individuals was an effective fund-raising strategy, only one of many employed by the *Lutheran Hour*. The *Hour* promoted annual and lifetime sponsorship programs and encouraged gifts and bequeaths with a “Memorial Wreath” commemorative lithograph card. For \$150 per year an individual or group could sponsor an overseas station. There were Easter seals every spring. Through “Acres for Christ,” the profits from otherwise fallow farmland enriched *Lutheran Hour* coffers; staffers also collected and sorted used stamps for resale to collectors (Spence 92; Paul Maier 223–24). During the Second World War the *Hour* sent out thousands of pocket-sized New Testaments published by the Gideons and small “Wartime Prayer Guide” booklets featuring appropriate prayers for different kinds of servicemen in dire circumstances (“Prayer for When Seriously Wounded,” etc.). For years the signature gift was a little gold lapel pin in the shape of a cross, a very popular item requested by many donors.

For a time Maier could announce on the air that the program depended on financial contributions and freewill offerings for its continuance. In the program’s twelfth season (1944–45) Mutual prohibited any solicitation of funds during religious broadcasts, which it now confined to Sunday mornings. Maier had to drop the second live broadcast that had served the western time zones, although there were still transcription broadcasts on those stations. According to the LLL’s historian, contributions to the *Lutheran Hour* briefly declined as a result of these changes (Pankow and Pankow 77). Mutual’s new policies were very specific: the program could provide its mailing address only four times in a single program (though not immediately following a request for prayers, lest that be construed as solicitation) and could make no mention of “any phrase which suggests, however indirectly, that contributions are desired from the listening audience.”¹⁷

Concerned about potential revenue loss under these new rules (a concern that turned out to be unfounded), Maier relied more heavily on another suc-

successful fund-raising strategy: mass meetings or “rallies,” held in large arenas, stadiums, army facilities, and county fairs. Rallies had been employed throughout the program’s history; the largest packed 27,500 under one roof in Chicago on 3 October 1943, for a live broadcast, an address by the governor of Indiana, and Maier’s sermon titled “America, Return to God” (Pankow and Pankow 61–62). Huldah often joined Walter on these stumping trips, giving speeches such as “The Human Interest Side of the Lutheran Hour” to “ladies’ groups” (Paul Maier 233). Each rally could be counted on to generate \$5,000 to \$10,000 apiece (Spence 91), and Maier’s schedule was rigorous: in May 1948 alone he conducted thirteen rallies in as many cities across the Pacific Northwest, leaving little more than a travel day between each speaking engagement the entire month long.¹⁸

One kind of wealth all Maier’s fund-raising did not generate was personal. He, Huldah, and their sons lived modestly in seminary housing, bought much of their furniture at public auctions, and vacationed at Lutherland or at a small lake cottage year after year. Maier’s professorial salary of \$250 a month, which never increased, was their only income. In 1944 Walter gave up teaching in order to devote himself full time to the radio program and the accelerated rally schedule; the LLL reimbursed his salary during this indefinite “leave of absence” from the seminary, and he never received any direct compensation for the broadcasts (Paul Maier 244; “Lutheran” 1).

The program’s success, visibility, and size brought new problems and opportunities. For one, Maier’s stance on various political issues provoked some listeners. He took an early and undeviating opposition to Communism—not to collectivism per se but to the atheism, militarism, and religious persecution he perceived in Communist countries in Europe and elsewhere. Although his anti-Communism fit in well with the overall cultural climate in the postwar years, in 1945 a Kansas City Unitarian minister named Leon Birkhead, head of an organization called Friends of Democracy, called for investigation of Maier on grounds that his program was anti-Semitic and Red-baiting. Bertermann parried the charges with evidence that Birkhead had taken quotes out of context regarding Jews, so that accusation at least was groundless. The parallel problem was the tendency of groups on the extreme right to co-opt Maier’s name, giving the impression he endorsed their activities; in 1949, for example, Maier was lumped with the likes of virulent right-winger Gerald K. Winrod in an accusatory article by Eleanor Roosevelt published in her column “My Day,” a connection she later retracted.

Maier often ran afoul of his network’s policies on objectionable and controversial material on the air. Under the National Association of Broadcasters Code of Conduct established in 1939, programs with controversial content or attacks on race or religion were barred from the air—partly in response to the hatemongering of CBS “religious” broadcaster Father Charles Coughlin in the



William A. Maier energetically shared his Bible-based messages not only on the *Lutheran Hour* but also in special gatherings. His reputation made them media events.

thirties. Mutual dropped some questionable programs in the forties and shortened the leash on others, including the *Lutheran Hour*, requiring scripts to be submitted in advance each week. The network's vigilant director of religious activities, Elsie Dick, sent a weekly telegram or letter excising hundreds of statements she deemed too political, graphic, or controversial for a religious broadcast—especially in Maier's castigation of the wasteful horrors of war, the evils of abortion, or the imminent Communist threat.¹⁹ In one instance Dick expressed her frustration with Maier announcing the death toll from the Hiroshima bomb: "We consistently ask our religious broadcasters not to discuss specific attributes of atomic bomb. This is highly controversial issue, especially at this time."²⁰

If Maier was not alone in making statements networks thought unsuitable for religious programs, he was also not alone in his conviction that paid-time religious broadcasting should be liberated from the control of networks and restrictions on time slots. Another broadcaster, James DeForest Murch, spokesman of the *Christians' Hour*, took the lead in condemning Mutual's altered policies and its censorship. Murch and several other well-known religious broadcasters, members of the newly organized National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), believed that the Federal Council of Churches had for years

worked behind the scenes to influence the radio industry against fundamentalist commercial broadcasters (Blackmore; Saunders; Hangen).²¹ Maier and Bertermann met with Murch in fall of 1943, encouraging his ongoing print campaign against the Federal Council and engaging the NAE in the *Lutheran Hour's* effort to stay on the Mutual airwaves. Maier and Bertermann also pledged to throw their support behind a new organization, which would be a "pressure group" for evangelical and fundamentalist broadcasters. As a result, the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) was organized in 1944 to advocate for "gospel" broadcasters' right to purchase airtime (Ward 65–70), a cause that did make considerable progress in the late forties and the fifties—though perhaps for economic reasons as much as ideological ones.

As Hoover and Wagner have argued, the sustaining-time system dominated religious broadcasting content from the late 1930s into the 1970s, although fundamentalist and evangelical commercial broadcasters, like Maier, held on and built sometimes substantial audiences. Furthermore, as the example of the *Lutheran Hour* illustrates, the radio industry categorized religious broadcasting as inherently controversial by the thirties, a topic to be pursued in the most general way and with careful restriction on content and time. Noting a contrast to print media, in which "magazine" formats successfully included a variety of topics, Hoover and Wagner claim radio programming that stood out as different—as much of public service or religious programming did—was pushed to the margins so as not to interrupt the homogeneous "flow" that characterizes broadcast media (Hoover and Warner 20–21). However, the program's ability not only to hang on to commercial time but to demonstrate significant growth suggests that religious broadcasting built a bulwark against that marginalization, or at least complicates our notion of radio's homogeneity during its "golden" decades. The *Lutheran Hour's* commercial success in an industry driven by money—Maier's ability, in other words, to operate by the rules of the game and win—only drives home the realization that conservative religion had a prominent place in American mass media and a large audience for its ideas even as early as the 1930s.

The crowning achievement of Bible-based preaching programs such as the *Lutheran Hour* was to make conservative religion visible to itself. During the years before a conservative Christian national movement had a discernible political or organizational form, radio religion offered listeners the sense that they were part of a national movement. A small denomination such as the LCMS wielded perhaps disproportional cultural authority, but since its listenership included many thousands of like-minded people of other faiths, the *Lutheran Hour* helped broker a lasting sense of connectedness among evangelicals in general. When, as was his custom, Maier used the first person plural ("we need," "we believe," "we see in America today") people were listening, nodding, and joining in an important act of imagining a community into existence. Sometimes the com-



Maier, center, reads through the mail while workers process requests and replies. Many free items—such as the lapel “emblem cross” pin—were offered to listeners, thus swelling the number of requests. Maier firmly believed the cross pin was an evangelistic witness and conversation opener.

munity was more than imagined, as people listened in groups: two examples from the early thirties were an assembled Bible class in Sarcoxie, Missouri, and “twenty two Lutherans and Methodists” of Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, gathered in a Methodist meetinghouse.²²

Tantalizing hints in Maier’s fan correspondence and in his own writings suggest that the *Lutheran Hour* reached across lines of both class and race. Unlike Father Coughlin’s explicit working-class appeal, Maier’s program was pitched to a more middle-class crowd, perhaps most resonating with second-generation immigrant families whose fortunes and social position were on the rise in postwar America. Group listening of the variety just mentioned was the exception; radio instructed, moved, and entertained people in their private homes and could toy with or renegotiate racial boundaries because the performers were invisible to the audience and individual members of the audience were invisible to each other. Maier personally believed, and publicly preached, that race did not matter to God and that racism was a sin—thereby winning some black listeners and perhaps offending some white ones. This belief underlay the

Hour's aggressive campaign to preach overseas in the local spoken languages, not English. Maier rejoiced when blacks wrote to him, since American Lutheranism had been "unknown or misinterpreted" in black communities (Maier, "Airwaves" xxxii). Because correspondents rarely mentioned their race in letters to the *Lutheran Hour*, the few letters that mentioned the writer was "a colored boy," "a colored physician," or "a colored woman" must stand for many others in which the writer, though not white, did not make specific mention of his or her race.

Audiences connected emotionally to Maier with their letters. In his twenty years as spokesman of the program, Maier received over 4.3 million pieces of correspondence. Letters recounted conversions, dramatic rescues from the brink of suicide, and decisions to return to church after years of dallying in sin.²³ Maier invited listeners to write to him, promising to provide answers and counsel to their spiritual and personal problems. This turned out to be a massive undertaking, occupying more of Maier's time than any other commitment, and keeping him dictating letters late into the night. Over the years he developed a system for counseling by mail. His secretarial staff, numbering a hundred in the late forties and supplemented by volunteers from the Lutheran Business Women of St. Louis, read and sorted the mail, setting aside letters that petitioned Maier for advice or help. Maier classified common problems and questions into four hundred categories and would usually send a prepared reply, personalized with individual information from the letters themselves. Many asked for doctrinal clarification and for help reconciling different denominational practices with scripture, or wondered about the propriety of modern activities such as movies, card playing, or lodge membership. Other categories of prepared replies hint at the troubles *Lutheran Hour* correspondents endured: "forgiveness—haunted by memory of former sin," "Lutheran-Catholic marriage deadlock," "suicide—eternal fate of," "when troubles mount in Old Age," "university student's early confusion," and "Comfort and encouragement [for people] whose troubles were removed after prayer but came back" (Heerboth 1–25; Paul Maier 185).

Issues from the letters often inspired sermon topics. On occasion he even prepared a sermon to benefit a single correspondent, then called the person to alert him or her to the upcoming broadcast (Spence 89). Others mentioned that they felt the message spoken that week was somehow intended just for them. A Presbyterian pastor wrote approvingly of Maier's ability to preach as if to each listener individually. "I of course hear the pompous vapidities and glittering generalities of the Fosdicks and Cadmans," he began, "and it is refreshing to hear the apostolic Gospel of the crucified and risen Son of God coming with a note of authority and yet at the same time the pleading evangelistic note beseeching men to look to Jesus and be reconciled to God."²⁴

Maier's pace of work—divided between writing, speaking, and travel—accelerated in the late forties. In July 1949 Bertermann negotiated a contract with

ABC radio at a cost of \$9,200 a week for a time slot he considered very favorable. However, in order for the ABC and Mutual programs not to compete, Maier would need to prepare two separate sermons each week, sometimes in addition to speaking at rallies on Sunday. Concerned for his time and health, the board asked him to cut back on his schedule of rallies in order to prepare the additional sermons for the ABC broadcasts.

Their concern proved timely. In December 1949 Maier suffered a series of massive heart attacks. He died on 11 January 1950, at age fifty-six. His would have been the first nationally televised funeral; it was broadcast over KSD St. Louis but technical problems prevented its transmission beyond Chicago. The long line of mourners and well-wishers who filed past the casket in the chapel of Concordia Seminary were largely unknown to Maier's own family; his son speculated that they represented a "biopsy" of the radio audience (Paul Maier 367).

The *Lutheran Hour* went on until a successor could be named. Lawrence Acker, the program's pastoral adviser since 1941, took over the 1950–51 season. He was followed by Armin Oldsen, a regular summer speaker on the program, until 1953; he had been a university youth counselor and professor at Valparaiso University before becoming *Lutheran Hour* speaker (Pankow and Pankow 83, 222). Dr. Oswald "Ozzie" Hoffmann, who held the position until 1988, followed him. The *Lutheran Hour* speaker is now Dr. Dale A. Meyer.

Maier's death left a leadership vacuum in gospel broadcasting as well as a vacancy at the KFUE microphone. The torch of leadership of the community of evangelical broadcasters passed not to the string of *Lutheran Hour* successors but to an up-and-coming young revivalist, Billy Graham. Theodore Elsner, Philadelphia Gospel Tabernacle broadcaster and NRB president, sought out Graham at an Ocean City hotel a few months after Maier's death and urged him to take up a radio program now that Maier was no longer the "national voice for the gospel" (Ward 75–77). Graham remembers Elsner encouraging him, "Billy, you must go on national radio. You know Dr. Maier is dead, and you're the man God could use to touch America through radio" (Graham 177). Through Elsner's connections a pair of promoters for the *Lutheran Hour*, Walter Bennett and Fred Dienert, arranged for Graham's ABC time slot for the program that became *Hour of Decision*, the only evangelical radio program to garner the kinds of audience numbers (fifteen million over a thousand stations) that Maier had claimed (Ward 81). Graham and Oswald Hoffmann developed a close working relationship through their mutual involvement in the US Congress on Evangelism in the 1960s (Hoffmann 215–30).

Although the *Lutheran Hour* continued to grow both in the United States and overseas, its overall audience diminished with the rise of television—though audience share may have increased somewhat. In the late forties, when seventy out of every hundred radios were in use on Sundays, four tuned in the *Lutheran Hour* (5.7 share). In 1955 33% of radios were in use on Sundays, with two tun-

ing in to the *Lutheran Hour* (6.06 share) (Pankow and Pankow 88). In 1956 the program received a Nielsen rating as the nation's top radio program (Meyers 29). But the halcyon days of radio were over, and the governing board of the program even wondered if the *Lutheran Hour* could present its message more effectively in some other format, such as a drama (Purcell; Pankow and Pankow 91). Even while keeping its sermon format and continuing its overseas outreach, the *Lutheran Hour* lost its evangelistic edge in the United States. Whether the loss of the "unchurched" in the listening audience preceded or precipitated a shift in the program's focus is not certain; likewise, television's effect on the religious radio industry in the fifties is murky. But clearly by the late fifties, the *Lutheran Hour* and its speaker had to acknowledge that the audience for their program consisted largely of Protestant Christians, rather than the "entire nation" that Maier imagined himself preaching to.

Let me offer an instructive contrast between one of Walter Maier's final sermons and one offered ten years later by Oswald Hoffmann. Maier's sermon, titled "They Cannot Kill Christ," aired 15 January 1950, clearly and directly addressed nonchurchgoing listeners. His opening prayer referenced "atheists, Communists and scoffers" who are doomed to destruction. Commenting on the eight hundred thousand abortions he claimed were being performed every year in the United States, Maier urged listeners to put aside the evil desires they might have to add to this number. He compared the situation to the Bible episode in which Herod ordered the deaths of children in Judea, and reminded his audience that Herod "died soon afterward amid indescribable agony, as *you scoffers* will end, unless you repent and get right with God through humble trust and faith in your Redeemer." Maier, although speaking to many within his own denomination and other pious Christians, obviously believed he had "scoffers" in the radio audience who were listening and might be persuaded by his message.²⁵

Ten years later Hoffmann had another audience in mind. Speaking on the subject of worship in January 1960, Hoffmann asked his listeners, "Why do *you* attend church?" (presupposing, of course, that they already did) and suggested a number of ways that the Sunday church experience could be enhanced through preparation and prayer. He charged his listeners not to reserve one day for God and the other six for secular living. With these comments he hoped to reach people so habitual and consistent in their worship that they were at risk of becoming complacent in their religious life. Hoffmann enjoined his audience to enhance an ongoing relationship with God, rather than call people to begin one. The broadcast's orientation thus had shifted from saving nonbelievers to pastoring the faithful.²⁶ But those "faithful" were people with by now a lengthy acquaintance with the mass media and a thorough immersion in its consumerism and popular culture. Hoffmann chaired the American Bible Society translation committee that produced the *Good News Bible*, a paraphrase of the book in contemporary English; in 1969 he planned a series of broadcasts aimed

at youth incorporating music “in the style of the currently popular ‘Simon and Garfunkel’” (Meyers 42; Hoffmann 230–33).

Interestingly, the program that had paved the way for commercial religious broadcasting during the years when radio was dominant benefited from gifts of sustaining time in the television era. The pendulum of government regulation had swung away from station owners’ rights, emphasizing instead the public nature of the airwaves (e.g., Kron 1967) and freeing up airtime for religion, even fundamentalist religion. When 145 new stations added the *Lutheran Hour* to their schedules in 1971, 90% did so with sustaining time (Pankow and Pankow 168–69). In the 1970s and 1980s evangelical radio both as a genre and as a station format quietly grew into a significant industry serving the growing evangelical religious subculture. In 1988 the *Lutheran Hour* and *Hour of Decision* aired on over six hundred religious stations in the United States but, as Schultze has pointed out, “edified a rather small national flock of committed evangelical radio station listeners while largely escaping public notice” (Schultze, “Invisible” 176).

Maier’s lifetime thus bridged the golden age of religious radio, when the limited outlets for broadcasting could magnify a minority view, and the beginning of the present era of mass media, when evangelicals and other religious conservatives are more visible but, arguably, less influential. Ironically, the greater visibility and cultural cachet awarded by the Missouri Synod Lutherans’ involvement on national network radio led to an increased number of radio stations and other media outlets for religious programming, which in turn decreased the saturation of evangelical religion in the mass media. Evangelicals carved out a more permanent, less contested place for themselves in US radio by the 1970s, as the radio market became more specialized and accommodating of alternative station formats. In exchange evangelicals sacrificed access to the “unchurched” listening audience, the original reason for broadcasting. Although Maier did not live to see it, the *Lutheran Hour* became a victim of its own success.

Notes

1. *Lutheran Hour* is a registered trademark of the International Lutheran Laymen’s League and its Lutheran Hour Ministries.
2. Documents regarding this dispute and the text of the FCC decision dated 2 Mar. 1938 may be found in the Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO (Henceforth CHI), KFUE Collection, “KFUE Correspondence, 1935–1939;” see also Federal Communications Commission.
3. Herman Hohenstein, letter to the Southeastern District, 10 May 1940, “Radio Committee Correspondence, 1940,” KFUE Collection, CHI.
4. “Meeting the Challenge,” pamphlet, n.d. (c. 1941), Exhibit VI, Federal Communications Commission, 1949 license renewal application, ACC# 173–58–A4, Box 28, KFUE Documents, Federal Radio Commission records, Suitland, MD.
5. Data from Maier, “Man of the Hour” 121, 167, 171, 173, 174, 176, 179, 180, 184, 271, 274, 278, 336, 348. See also Meyers 14, 16.

6. "Womanhood," by Walter Maier, *Lutheran Hour*, KFUO, St. Louis, 21 Nov. 1937.
7. "A Russian. . .," letter to Walter A. Maier, 19 Mar. 1931, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 24; "One of Many," letter to Walter A. Maier, n.d., CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 24.
8. "A Report to the Lutheran Laymen's League Executive Committee," 9 Oct. 1948, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 6, Folder 44.
9. Walter A. Maier, letter to Charles Lang, 25 Oct. 1945, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 23. See also Paul Maier 279.
10. Mrs. Arnold M. Kiehn, letter to Dr. Maier, 19 Apr. 1942, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 28.
11. These numbers come from expense records June 1945– June 1949, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 6, Folder 43.
12. See, for example, "Lutheran Hour Detailed Income & Expense," Apr. 1949, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 6, Folder 43; also "Operating Statement, Lutheran Hour," 31 Apr. 1949, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 6, Folder 43.
13. E.g., Walter A. Maier, letter to Mrs. Arent Heil, 3 Nov. 1944, Collection of the International Lutheran Laymen's League (henceforth LLL), "Walter A. Maier Letters;" Walter A. Maier, letter to Adolph Naehner, 28 Feb. 1946, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 23.
14. "A Report to the Lutheran Laymen's League Executive Committee," 13 Mar. 1948, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 6, Folder 44.
15. "Keymen's Manual," 1944, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 6, Folder 52, n. pag.
16. The script is in the Concordia Collection: "Into All the World," May 1953, ERB Collection, Box 9, Folder 13.
17. Elsie Dick, letter to Rudy Bertermann, 13 Jan. 1948; Elsie Dick, letter to Walter A. Maier, 15 May 1949, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 29.
18. "A Report to the Lutheran Laymen's League Executive Committee," 13 Mar. 1948, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 6, Folder 44.
19. E.g., Elsie Dick, letter to Walter A. Maier, 25 January 1948; Elsie Dick, letter to Walter A. Maier, 10 April 1949, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 29.
20. Elsie Dick, letter to Walter A. Maier, 29 May 1949, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 29.
21. The Federal Council of Churches joined with several other Christian organizations in 1950 to become the National Council of Churches of Christ in America (NCCCCA, usually just abbreviated NCC).
22. Rev. Harry Everett Brooks, letter to Walter A. Maier, 3 Oct. 1930, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 27; Mrs. Emile K. Goodners, letter to KFUO, 16 Apr. 1933, CHI, KFUO Collection, "Correspondence 1932–1934."
23. Excerpts of these letters were reprinted in the annual volumes of Maier's sermons; for a full listing of Maier's publications see Concordia's guide to the Walter A. Maier Collection.
24. George C. Swedburg, letter to Dr. Meyer [sic], 3 February 1931, CHI, WAM Collection, Box 3, Folder 27.
25. Walter A. Maier, "They Cannot Kill Christ," prerecorded radio sermon broadcast posthumously 15 Jan. 1950, audiotape, LLL.
26. Oswald C. J. Hoffmann, "Worship Him," radio sermon broadcast 3 Jan. 1960, vinyl transcription disk, LLL.

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CHAPTER 7**“THE TENDENCY TO DEPRAVE AND
CORRUPT MORALS”****Regulation and Irregular Sexuality in Golden
Age Radio Comedy**

Matthew Murray

SEXUAL EXPRESSION AND SEXUALITY were central to the processes of Golden Age radio comedy. Not only was sexuality pivotal to comedy programming, it was a recurring feature around which the institutional and cultural interactions between networks, sponsors, audiences, performers, and regulators revolved. Sexual humor produced moments of excess and controversy, but it was also a regular and accepted ingredient of broadcast comedy. The hotly disputed issue involved the form that sexual representations should or should not take.

This essay looks behind the official history of radio comedy to uncover the aural representation and reception of sex, sexuality, and gendered display. It focuses on two figures that particularly troubled the radio network censors: the “loose woman” (represented most conspicuously by Mae West) and the “lavender gentleman” (an identifiably effeminate, homosexual male character). Deeply rooted in the vaudeville tradition from which radio comedy emerged, these figures were condemned by moral reformers and aroused the institutional rancor of the censors, who feared that legal retribution might result from their continued appearance. By revising scripts, deleting characters, and prohibiting transgressive behaviors, the network censors attempted to refine and contain the type and scope of comic sexuality that was transmitted into American homes. To varying degrees, this action was resisted and circumvented by some performers and audiences.

Although radio comedians’ misdemeanors often upset prevailing moral orthodoxies, their behaviors should not be regarded as necessarily or inherently

liberatory. Often their sexual references and characterizations still reproduced, in effect, the sexual hierarchies and norms of US culture at the time. Consequently, this essay calls into question those theories of comedy that regard it as a genre founded upon exploiting cultural tensions and subverting social norms (see Andrews 51; but see also Jenkins 41–48, 251). Even the censors recognized that radio's propensity for suggestiveness, innuendo, and stimulation of the imagination was central to its popular appeal. Sometimes their institutional and moral regulation was directed at prohibiting particularly egregious sexual references, but more often it involved a process of softening material, not erasing its basic comic logic altogether. This account complicates and revises formalist, genre-centered assumptions of comedy by separately considering how the loose woman and the lavender gentleman invoked different cultural dynamics surrounding the relationships between sexuality, femininity, and masculinity. Because his characterization was more culturally slippery and was activated in a way that reinforced certain social and cultural hierarchies, the lavender gentleman proved more resilient than the freely sexual female. In those instances where he appeared, sexual norms were inverted as a comic device, without any associated social subversion. The loose woman, on the other hand, explicitly challenged the boundaries of taste and femininity that the radio network censors were trying to establish for the medium.

Mae West and the Limits of Arousal

On 12 December 1937 Mae West appeared on network radio, and the patterns of broadcast censorship were never the same again. In the space of thirty minutes, during what was to be West's only major radio performance, heterosexual female desire was accorded unprecedented license over the airwaves. The program produced a vitriolic reaction from religious and reformist organizations, which criticized the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) for failing to apply appropriate editorial oversight. By orchestrating a campaign to rid radio of similar moral improprieties in the future, these groups managed to extend their social influence into the realm of broadcasting regulation. However, this campaign provoked a backlash in the popular press and from members of the general public, who advocated a more relaxed policy regarding the aural representation of sex and female sexuality. The fierce exchanges that took place in the aftermath of West's appearance attested to a wider divergence of opinion over what constituted normative gendered sexuality and the limits of acceptable female public deportment.

The Chase & Sanborn Hour was a popular weekly variety show, featuring ventriloquist Edgar Bergen, his dummy Charlie McCarthy, and celebrity guests from the entertainment world. The episode two weeks prior to Christmas 1937 brought McCarthy together with Mae West in what one fan magazine dubbed

"The Sex-Appeal Battle of the Century" ("This Week"). But the "mistress of fire and the wooden lover" generated more heat than expected, sparking a level of protest over the program for which NBC, program sponsor Standard Brands (manufacturer of Chase & Sanborn coffee), and advertising agency J. Walter Thompson were totally unprepared. Following the broadcast, radio faced what the trade journal *Variety* described as "the most aroused public criticism it ha[d] yet encountered" ("Mae West Review"). Editorials across the country condemned the moral contagion that the show represented, complaining that radio had been "prostituting" its services by permitting "impurity [to] invade the air."¹ Catholic leaders and women's club officials reprimanded the series' sponsor for presenting a "disgusting broadcast" and chastised the network for defying "even the most elementary sense of decency."²

The expressions of revulsion were directed at an Adam and Eve sketch performed by West and master of ceremonies Don Ameche, as well as suggestive dialogue between the actress and Charlie McCarthy. During the Garden of Eden routine, Eve/West declared her listlessness in God's paradise and invited Adam/Ameche to "leave this dump" and "go places and do things." Following her mate's unenthusiastic response, Eve seduced the serpent (played by McCarthy) in order to procure the forbidden fruit, which she then served to Adam "like women are gonna feed men for the rest of time." Laden with innuendo, the Garden of Eden skit emphasized woman's desire for carnal experience and Eve's active enthusiasm in relinquishing her virginity for pleasurable purposes. This combination of religious revisionism and female sexual aggression provided the catalyst for the public denunciations that immediately began to appear. The Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco described how the actress had, "with bawdy vulgarity[,] burlesqued the biblical story of the fall from grace of Adam and Eve, and combined a travesty of the doctrine of original sin with an indecent suggestion of sexuality" (qtd. in "Mae West Skit"). The National Council of Catholic Women threatened to boycott the sponsor's products, proclaiming that it was "almost unthinkable that a firm catering to the women of this country and seeking their patronage should so affront them" (qtd. in "Mae West Case").

After a commercial and musical interlude in the program, Mae West applied her seductress skills on McCarthy, iconographically figured in 1930s America as a somewhat suave but impudent adolescent—a peculiar hybrid of innocent womanizer. "Oh, Mae, don't be so rough. To me, love is peace and quiet," pleaded McCarthy at one stage, to which West replied, "That ain't love—that's sleep." Judging from the inflammatory reaction, serious social taboos of intergenerational intimacy had been breached. Just as with child impersonators such as Fanny Brice, McCarthy's humor could entail suggestive themes so long as the sexual aspects of his adult characteristics were kept well in check (see Hilmes 122–23). Even NBC censors were to retrospectively admit that "Charley [sic]

McCarthy has done a good job as a pert, sophisticated youngster. When a woman of the Mae West type and age goes to work on a boy, we are getting on dangerous ground indeed."³

To absolve themselves from charges of moral laxity, NBC and the show's sponsor blamed West personally for the uproar generated by the program. NBC banned mention of her name over its stations and forbade other comedians from referring to the incident ("Mae West's Name"). A network decree declared her an "unfit radio personality," and as a result, West did not reappear over the airwaves for another twelve years. Significantly, however, once this strategy of ostracism became clear, a sizeable section of public opinion shifted to support West against this corporate mentality. Opposition mounted to the manner in which the actress had been demonized by the clergy and "left holding the full bag of dirt" by the network and sponsors ("What the People"). Editorials appeared in metropolitan newspapers criticizing the entire episode as "much ado about nothing."⁴ NBC memos from early 1938 remarked that audience correspondence had shifted from admonitions of West to praising her as "'a fine woman' [and] 'a fine actress.'"⁵ (Under the heading "The Woman Always Pays," the *Chicago Daily News* spearheaded a campaign on her behalf:

NBC and the commercial sponsors of the program knew Mae West. They knew her technique. They'd heard her and seen her. They coached her in rehearsals. But when the public protests swamped them they pretended they had Mae all mixed up with Mary Pickford or Shirley Temple.⁶)

Letters to the FCC also demonstrated a popular resentment of NBC's corporate policy and recognition of an ethical double standard in operation. Hundreds of letter writers, male and female, urged the FCC not to introduce regulations that might sanitize radio programming by expurgating adult content. (In a telephone survey of randomly selected members of the public undertaken by the fan magazine *Radio Guide*, 59% who had heard the December 12 episode approved of West's performance, while 60% responded that they would like to hear more sexually suggestive programming over the radio than currently existed (Plummer, 5 Mar. 1938; Bisch).

A recurrent theme stressed by many of West's defenders was that her material had been no worse than that of comedians such as Fred Allen, Eddie Cantor, and George Jessel. Clearly, therefore, West's femaleness made all the difference: the consternation aroused among the reform-minded had as much to do with the sex of the speaker as the ribald content of her words. As a female voice speaking out of order, West's embodied expression aroused Depression-era apprehensions among the reform-minded regarding gendered modes of public presentation and the collapse of feminine manners. By contrast, other Americans refuted West's notoriety as a moral transgressor who threatened



Charlie McCarthy was Mae West's "man" at a recent "Chase & Sanborn" broadcast, but she "done him wrong." Her appearance made headlines and brought a deluge of protests from coast to coast. Courtesy Library of American Broadcasting.

social values and considered her instead the victim of moral prudery. *Some* members of the public, therefore, explicitly reacted against the mobilized protest of the cultural conservatives and defended the program as, to quote one female letter writer, "by far the most entertaining of the week."⁷

Mae West was thus integrally figured in the controversy. Her exaggerated screen and stage persona—a "loose woman" and "tough girl" with a penchant for the finer things in life and a questionable ethical history—constituted a central icon of sexual deviance in twenties and thirties American culture. West symbolized the immoral reputation of Hollywood to many Americans, a distinction that garnered both admiration and vilification. The actress's identification with the character of the 1890s bordello madam, her renown for transgressive heterosexuality (in the form of actively seeking, discussing, and enjoying copulation), and her personification as a gold-digging hussy remained undiminished by the time of her radio performance. As Ramona Curry, Pamela Robertson, and Mary Beth Hamilton have described, West's fame for moral impropriety involved multiple contraventions of normative gender, class, sexual, and racial taboos. Her theatrical productions had frequently incorporated gay characters,

However...

and West herself had quickly become an icon of homosexual admiration (Chauncey 51). (As a blond fetish, West apparently disavowed any identifiable ethnicity; yet she had become associated with black culture and exotic sexuality by singing “dirty blues” numbers in her early movies, and personally and professionally liaising with African-American, Asian, and Native American men.⁸) Her own visible absence of ethnicity made her sexual deviance all the more disrupting and disturbing in relation to dominant racist discourses. In fact, the same Adam and Eve sketch had been performed over network radio on the *Maxwell House Showboat*, just three months prior to the *Chase & Sanborn* episode, without any ensuing controversy. On that occasion, the all-black cast had provoked no consternation within white America, apparently due to their racial stereotyping as naturally oversexualized.⁹

Mae West's ostentatious, fin-de-siècle exhibitionism stood in contrast to the prim, Victorian piety of female reformers. Generically referred to by the broadcast networks as “women's groups,” these reform-minded organizations were infused with a heavy sense of middle-class morality and an ethical correctness founded upon discipline and temperance. In the mid-1930s an umbrella organization, the Women's National Radio Committee (WNRC), was established to promote the scheduling of “cultural” programming.¹⁰ By 1936 the committee claimed to represent 20 million members and was devoted to preserving “Christian values” and ridding the airwaves of liquor commercials (“Woman”).

Mae West's performance was doubly offensive to the reformers and religious groups since it constituted an invasion of the home and a public declaration of female wantonness. However (even before the infamous West transmission, signs had become “increasingly plentiful” of an impending “campaign” by religious and reform organizations to bring about the “betterment of loudspeaker entertainment” (“Legion”; “Questionable”; “Production Code”). These groups were generally satisfied with the self-regulation machinery in place for motion pictures, and had begun to turn their attention toward radio (see D'Emilio and Freedman 280–85).

Aural Stimulations and Contested Imaginations

(The lewd suggestiveness mingled with the sound from her lips, makes one think she should wear a veil over the lower part of her face to hide her nudity.¹¹)

Since the early days of broadcasting, defining what constituted appropriate programming fare for the public airwaves and what was beyond the pale had been a highly contentious issue. Newspaper editorials and trade journals from the period contain numerous references to isolated broadcast indiscretions and recurring lapses in decorum by particular performers. Patterns of heightened anxiety at specific moments are clearly discernible, however. After several years

of relative tranquility regarding this subject, a crescendo of objections emerged in 1937. Daytime serials, variety comedy acts, and children's programs were singled out for critique; even *The Chase & Sanborn Hour* itself was identified by NBC executives as receiving "considerable adverse comment."¹²

By elevating the "auditory sense to a new pinnacle of importance," radio was in many ways considered by moral reformers more threatening than the movies in its potential for detrimental influence on impressionable members of the public (Cantril and Allport 19). The technological architecture of the medium—its invisible, omnidirectional, and pervasive messages—challenged the listener to re-create an imaginary mental picture from the aural stimulations transmitted. Consequently, radio programming did not simply deliver the public sphere into the private realm; it also dislocated the listener by transporting her/him into her/his own "word-excited imagination" (Archibald MacLeish, qtd. in Havig 8). The interplay between these two processes made radio a powerful force for the possible disruption or reaffirmation of the contained and carefully managed imaginaries cultivated by mainstream religious, political, and social institutions. Many radio shows relied upon a propagation of the fantastic for their appeal, a feature of the medium that carried destabilizing cultural possibilities. As announcer Joseph Julian suggested, the airwaves produced a "Theater in the Mind" that required creative expenditure from the listener, thereby inviting a mutual and direct collaboration between performer and audience member (232).¹³ This intrinsic quality constituted both a bane and a benefit to the industry. It made the medium distinctive and engaging, but because of its heavy reliance on mental imagery and direct appeal to the emotions, the potential for arousing what NBC censors phrased "base trends of the imagination" remained a constant source of trepidation to the networks.¹⁴

While the networks dominated program distribution, sponsors and their advertising agencies held almost total control over commercial program production. Much of the entertainment talent during these years came from ex-vaudeville performers, and fiction programming in general was heavily reliant on theater, stage, and concert-hall customs. A confrontational, "verbal slapstick" style was particularly popular with radio comedians, who delighted in the "outrageous distortion" permitted by the medium (Havig 14). In effect, these comedians practiced their humor by reorienting aspects of everyday life in order to achieve a momentary mental confusion that upset audiences' commonsense assumptions and expectations regarding the conventions of language, standard behavior, and the organization of social relations.

Sponsors

Comedy

Most often, then, radio comedians and scriptwriters relied upon language's complexity and interpretive openness to aurally titillate listeners, a practice encouraged by sponsors to the degree that it improved the caliber of the show's comedy through its subtlety. For example, stimulating the audience's mental acumen through double-meaning dialogue was widespread. This featuring of

double entendres assumed a dual-level audience: innocents who wouldn't get the joke but who would be no worse off from having been exposed to it, and the more sophisticated members of the community who could find amusement in the inferences and allusions. Reformers and religious notables found this stratification troublesome, arguing that this method of aural suggestion aroused dormant salacious thoughts. To their minds, the vaudeville tradition evoked sordid urban spaces attended by men and women of dubious character (Sullivan). It cultivated a forbidden alternative for the vivid imagination of children and impressionable adults and promised to metaphysically transport them—as collaborators in the shenanigans—out of their domestic tranquility.

The radio networks were sympathetic to this logic. Given their responsibilities to affiliates and to the stations they owned and operated, the networks resolved early on in their histories to make advertisers, agencies, and performers more conscientious about the standards of taste expected during program productions. Additionally, the networks sought to forestall outside intervention and legitimate their own dominance within the industry by diverting public and political attention away from their oligopolistic economic power and toward issues of program quality. As the 1930s progressed, the networks increasingly implemented self-regulatory mechanisms and procedures to satisfy these interests (see Porter, "Who").

Song lyrics, for example, were toned down or deleted entirely prior to their delivery over the radio. This practice was applied to numerous artists and compositions, partly in response to Tin Pan Alley's growing proclivity toward suggestive phrases as jazz and blues numbers attained a broader popularity (Porter, "Dirty," "Reviewing"; "You Can't Sing"; Rivera-Sanchez 5–7).¹⁵ In 1933 NBC hired a song censor to "peruse the lyrics of every song published and considered for use on the air" ("Song Censor"). Unsurprisingly, Mae West herself was forced to revise numbers that she had performed on stage and screen. The lines "Come let's flag this joint so we can carry on/We can call it heaven when the shades are drawn!"—which were featured in a tune from her 1933 hit movie *I'm No Angel*—were cut, as were many less provocative meters (Porter, "Mae West"; "Keeping Naughty").

Editorial practices at NBC were institutionalized with the establishment of the Continuity Acceptance Department in 1934. Directly responsible to the Office of the President, Continuity Acceptance was set up to act as a buffer between the sales department, advertisers, the government, and listeners. It reviewed scripts according to a guideline of standards for material, determined whether products were acceptable for promotion over the network, responded to audience complaints, and served a general public relations function.¹⁶

Many of the public complaints over program content offenses in 1937 had specified West Coast origination as a major cause or contributing factor. A Detroit reporter declared that "until radio went to Hollywood it was compara-

tively clean," while an advertising journal noted that "one of the most noticeable changes in radio since the swing to Hollywood began has been the increased rowdiness of the programs and the much closer approach of the scripts to the level of the vaudeville stage" ("Blames"; "Radio Getting Rowdy"). In response to such objections, NBC established a Continuity Acceptance Department at their Sunset and Vine premises in Los Angeles in the summer of 1937 ("Hollywood Shows"). Charge of this division was considered by the network hierarchy to be a "petticoat" appointment—"not necessarily a woman . . . but . . . someone whose attitude is not aggressive but cooperative and more or less commiserative."¹⁷ The moral arbiter elected to occupy the new vacancy was the appropriately named Andrew Love. Love and his staff were answerable to the head of Continuity Acceptance in New York, Janet MacRorie, known "affectionately" within production circles as "the Old Maid on the Fourth Floor" (Patten; Pegg).¹⁸ As the "Old Maid" appellation implies, Continuity Acceptance, while perfectly acquainted with NBC's commercial imperatives, clearly aligned itself with the moral interests of the Women's National Radio Committee and other reform groups. So Continuity Acceptance perceived its mission to be one of upholding respectable values and re-creating in programming the assumed atmosphere and precepts of a middle-class household's front parlor.

The networks hoped to eliminate spontaneous digressions by radio comedians by requiring that agencies submit scripts of forthcoming shows for advance clearance.¹⁹ Hinging its operations upon the right to preview scripts, Continuity Acceptance was forced to interpret printed material in anticipation of its vocal rendition. From their institutional inception, the network censors clamped down on lewd jokes and double entendres, often earning the contempt of radio performers, who accused them of pandering to the whims of "Nice Nellies" and "Prim Pollies" (Patten 43; Wertheim 15). Even after prohibiting extemporaneous deviations and blatant euphemisms, however, the network censors were powerless to anchor printed language to fixed spoken meanings and to ensure that, in the words of Janet MacRorie, "something will sound the way it looks" (qtd. in Patten 164). Continuity Acceptance attempted to excise "anything that may offend any portion of the listening audience" through the tests of "accuracy, ethical business practice, common sense, and good taste" (MacRorie). But MacRorie admitted that "it is not always possible to foresee in reading the script the exact shade of meaning that the actor will give the line when it is read."²⁰

~~This~~ procedural crisis arose out of the intrinsic multiaccentuality of language (its openness to various meanings) and the multiplicity of interpretations resulting both from the performers' histrionic inflections and the audience's various socially influenced receptions of radio programs. The inability to exert absolute control over these variables was a matter of concern to reformers and the networks, since it implied a failure to contain the stimulation of the imagination that

was achieved in radio broadcasting. However, it also provided the networks with a safety valve in circumstances of extreme error, since they could disavow any direct authority over performative inferences and the mental projections of individual listeners. This was precisely NBC's strategy following the *Chase & Sanborn* broadcast—an approach that generated popular disdain for the network but enabled it to emerge from the incident comparatively unscathed.

Mae West had failed to report for the first rehearsal of *The Chase & Sanborn Hour* on the evening of Friday, 10 December. A copy of the show's script was delivered to her apartment; she found it boring and made revisions. At NBC's Los Angeles studio on Saturday afternoon a conference was held between the performers, J. Walter Thompson (JWT) representatives, and NBC executives, culminating in a final script that was acceptable to West, Chase & Sanborn, and Andrew Love. During the final rehearsal, West recited her lines "straight" and in "snappy fashion"—without the insinuations that were to characterize the broadcast rendition.²¹ Following the over-the-air transmission on Sunday, NBC first implied that West had improvised her suggestive dialogue. When this assertion proved untenable, the network declared that the actress had "taken liberties" during the show and her "mugging added plenty."²² Hollywood personnel claimed there was "nothing in the script itself which is offensive" and that "the whole matter reduces itself to the artist and the interpretation of the lines."²³ During its internal inquisition, the network's West Coast head of operations assured New York vice presidents that if NBC could establish a convincing case that West had enhanced the sexual overtones "deliberately," it would help their position "considerably."²⁴ The actress's reputation for spontaneous wisecracks allowed NBC and JWT to attribute the indiscretion to her personal style. The network even resorted to making several recordings from the Adam and Eve script, using a variety of actors and actresses, in an effort to lend credibility to its claim that the skit was above reproach as written ("On the Air," 29 Dec. 1937). These were furnished to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which had opened an inquiry into the incident, along with the printed version and a transcript of the program, so that the commissioners might "consider the manner of delivery as well as the literal meaning of the text."²⁵

Disregarding the popular expressions of support for Mae West and the heterogeneity of responses to the show, FCC chairman Frank McNinch admonished NBC to "insure against features that are suggestive, vulgar, immoral or of such other character as may be offensive to the great mass of right-thinking, clean-minded American citizens" in the future.²⁶ This presumption of a cultural consensus helped to validate the demands of the morality formation of reformers and religious organizations and rejected or marginalized the huge number of Americans with more tolerant viewpoints. It therefore navigated radio toward adopting and naturalizing program standards that supported ethical and cultural distinctions underlying existing social orthodoxies.

By positioning its own motivations as "socially responsible," NBC was able to turn the West-McCarthy fiasco to its advantage. "While we have a notable case on our hands," declared Janet MacRorie at the end of 1937, "the opportunity is ours to put [stricter enforcement of censorship duties] into effect and to obtain greater control over material broadcast."²⁷ The network admitted limited culpability in its involvement in the incident but pronounced that similar errors would not occur once radio outgrew its status as "infant prodigy" and greater self-vigilance was practiced.²⁸ During the course of 1938, NBC rewrote its standards of practice for radio programming, beefing up its guidelines on appropriate female decorum, among other things, a maneuver replicated by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) the following year ("Broadcasters"). This defensive strategy satisfied the reformers, who threw their support behind the networks. In return, NBC executives met with Catholic leaders on a regular basis from then on, and closer allegiances were also established with women's groups who had spoken out against the program. NBC's Women's Activities Division arranged meetings, programs, and joint ventures in association with women's organizations, especially the highly venerated Committee on Radio recently formed by the General Federation of Women's Clubs (National Broadcasting Company 62).²⁹ By mid-1938 the chairwoman of the WNRC was gratified that "broadcasters have become increasingly willing to cooperate [with us] and put on better programs" ("Better").

Swish Routines and Problems with Taste

The Mae West incident served to momentarily expose the institutional pressures that operated to limit radio's fantastic imaginary. In contrast, the campaign to eradicate "lavender gentlemen" from the airwaves was carried on for years, in a far less public fashion. References to and representations of homosexuality in radio programs in the 1930s and 1940s presented different problems to the guardians of moral norms and upholders of "good taste." The mere presence or mention of homosexuality in itself breached no stipulated standards of taste or decency. But it suggested a system of sexual difference and desire that was threatening to a social order structured around a naturalized heterosexuality. The contradiction that emerged in the censors' logic was this: the incarnation of homosexuality was deemed unobjectionable in terms of officially mandated programming standards, yet its appearance was nevertheless censured as morally abhorrent, and consequently was targeted for removal from the airwaves.

In the thirties and forties homosexuality was invoked regularly and sometimes quite explicitly on radio. The feminine gentleman, the queer remark, and the swish routine were resilient and recurrent features in network prime time comedy. Indeed, they were popular with radio comics for the very reason that they tiptoed on the brink of the impermissible and the inappropriate. Radio

comedians drew upon homosexuality in their sketches precisely because there was nothing inherently tasteless in its appearance, while it simultaneously aroused cultural prejudices and apprehensions and consequently operated as a source for anxious laughter. Unlike the “loose woman,” the effeminate gentleman was charming, not uncouth, more sophisticated than crass—yet his mere presence was nevertheless astonishing and invited ridicule. This ambivalent positioning (concurrently tasteful and questionable) made him both a favored character of radio comedians and a troubling figure for radio regulators, whose own moral perspective was itself founded upon the importance of politeness and respectability.

According to the dominant thinking in straight society during this period, homosexuality constituted both a symptom of mental degeneracy and an indicator of moral perversity. “Gayness” itself was equated with outright effeminacy in males. This assumed equivalence between feminine behavior and homosexuality permitted the extension of moral censorship into areas of speech and behavior that were otherwise impossible to classify as beyond the boundaries of good taste. Not only did intentionally feminine behavior in males upset the binary of sexual difference, but the censors and reformers regarded it as a direct signifier of aberrant sexualized behavior. To act effeminately was to be coded as gay and thus to have an identity defined by deviant sexual activity—and thus to be inherently indecent.

Even the slightest suggestion of homosexuality would produce hostile responses from regulatory authorities during the golden age of radio. Q+n. Internal memos from NBC’s Programming Department in 1935 noted “a definite tendency toward effeminate characterizations” in prime-time comedy and recommended deleting “anything of the lavender [sic] nature.”³⁰ The network provisionally attempted to “ban . . . material dealing with or bordering on . . . the sexual, the neurotic, [and] the perverted.”³¹ 11 Five years later NBC’s vice president of programming reported that he was “disturbed at the increasing number of ‘feminine gentlemen’ . . . who are being featured on our radio programs.” He went on to explain that while he did not “wish to appear arbitrary in this matter, . . . eliminating that type of character from . . . present or future shows . . . is of vital importance to radio generally and NBC in particular.”³²

This NBC executive was worried about appearing arbitrary because there were no official rules against male characters having high-pitched voices or suggestive lines in a same-sex context. Yet he was clearly reproducing the prevailing attitude that homosexuality was a moral abomination that had no place on a domestically enshrined medium such as radio. Along with the other networks, ★ NBC was increasingly committed to family-friendly entertainment and consequently was loath to be associated with alternative sexualities.

An NBC booklet from 1938 informed program producers, “Good taste and good radio are forged indelibly together. . . . The American people . . . are not

interested in radio programs dealing with sex or sex perversion."³³ When the National Association of Broadcasters rewrote its code of standards in 1939, it included the provision that references to sexual abnormalities (the era's prevailing definition of homosexuality) should not be allowed in radio programming. "Frequently," lamented Janet MacRorie around the same time, "the lines [in a script] give no indication that [a] part is to be played 'swish.' Our production directors are greatly handicapped, therefore, in their efforts to put on a clean show because of the fact that . . . [we have] no way of knowing through checking the script, that the part will be played effeminately." The problem articulated here was similar to that of the Mae West broadcast—the censors' inability to contain the openness of language or to control vocal inflections at the time of the performance. NBC tried to clamp down in this area by insisting to agencies, performers, and sponsors that such "sex-perverted characters" would not be tolerated in the future.³⁴ But the network's approach was unsuccessful—it was still conducting the campaign well into the 1950s.³⁵

Still, the challenge of language

Broadcasters and networks undertook such drastic preventive measures partly because they were worried that the FCC might consider that effeminate portrayals fit within its definition of indecency as "the tendency to deprave and corrupt morals" and hence provide reason enough to revoke a station's broadcasting license (qtd. in Rivera-Sanchez 5).³⁶ Vigilant moralists had certainly brought the matter to the FCC's attention. In 1935 a reform group called the National League for Decency in Radio had campaigned against a perceived increase in "sex delinquency and moral perversion" on the airwaves—pejorative terms certainly designed to include homosexuality ("Air Decency"; "More Reform"). The FCC also received critical letters from members of the public, such as one in 1941 that regarded "cracks alluding to homosexuality . . . not funny and . . . awkward for parents listening with children."³⁷

This confusion of the gendered order, so profoundly terrifying to gatekeepers of the family, was identified as transpiring almost exclusively within prime-time comedy shows, such as those starring Bob Hope, Eddie Cantor, and Abbott and Costello. But the performer who incorporated queer allusions most noticeably was Jack Benny, as media analysts Margaret McFadden and Alexander Doty have discussed. As McFadden and Doty have described, The Jack Benny Program was at times quite overt in its deployment of queer humor and jokes made around (and often at the expense of) effeminate male characters and characteristics. Both authors suggest that the peculiar circumstances of World War II allowed the gay subtexts in the Benny show to flourish in the early 1940s.

While I agree with this conclusion up to a point, it seems pertinent to consider why swish humor remained a staple of prime-time comedy, in the face of the regulatory opposition described above, over a much broader period of time. How can we account for the flagrant references to homosexuality that appeared in many popular radio programs of the 1930s, during what historian George

Chauncey (330) has described as a broader “crackdown on gay life” that occurred as the decade progressed? And despite the continually tight monitoring of these radio representations, gay gags and effeminate characters continued on the airwaves after the war. They had become so prevalent in television comedy by the early 1950s that the networks were forced to institutionalize even more stringent and comprehensive restrictions in an attempt to finally drive them off the air.³⁸

Although representations of homosexuality triggered alarm and bewilderment within the ranks of radio’s moral overseers, we should not mistake this disturbance as a necessarily progressive subversion. Homosexuality accrued a public presence in radio comedy but not a valid subjectivity—it was represented as a comic quirk, valuable for its odd perspective but not as a basis for identity. Even as the regulators contested its presence, homosexuality was made audible only within the contained system of differences and reversals of radio comedy.

Given the centrality of social inversion, “imaginative astonishment,” and comic chaos to vaudeville humor, the appearance of homosexual references within radio comedy begins to make more sense.³⁹ Pansy acts and swish routines had long been stock features within the vaudeville tradition of impersonating and razzing social types (Curtin). Once the studio audience became established practice in radio in the 1930s, the popularity of cross-dressing as a visual gag that had developed as part of the “quick-change act” aesthetic of the vaudeville stage reappeared. And there were also historical precedents within radio that the comedy shows of the thirties and forties drew upon. Some of the remote late night radio broadcasts from the late 1920s had originated from metropolitan nightclubs, where gay life and imitations of gay life were fairly common (Wertheim 7). Another predecessor was the male crooner, whose overtones of a suspiciously emasculated singing style were carried over into later tenors and sopranos, most notably Dennis Day and Frank Parker on *The Jack Benny Program* (McCracken).

By the mid-1930s there existed a broad range of radio representations that could be loosely categorized as comedy deriving from homosexuality. Explicit and implicit references to gayness, without any accompanying inference or characterization, were sometimes made for a quick laugh—judging from the reactions of the studio audience, the concept or thought of gayness was ticklish enough to provoke mirth in itself. An episode of *The Danny Kaye Show* (10 Feb. 1945) includes the following:

Danny: Evie, this isn’t just an ordinary letter, you know, it’s a Valentine.

Evie: Ohhhh, a Valentine. Well, that is precious cargo. Who are you
Valentining to?

Danny: Oh, it’s to my pal, Jack Benny.

(Big audience laugh)

Danny: (Defensively) Well, he is my pal.

Banter between male characters quite frequently could be read as inferentially sexual, but how clearly this was marked varied from situation to situation. In certain cases, the choice of language, delivery, and vocal inflection manifestly indicated that the actors were playfully coming on to each other in mock homoerotic fashion. In one episode of *The Bob Hope Show* the star is called to a movie studio in order to be measured for a costume. With Hope very deliberately having stripped down to his shorts, the following passage takes place:

Wardrobe Man: I haven't heard your show lately, Mr. Hope, who are you working for?

Hope: What quivers and trembles and shakes all the time? [*i.e.*, *Jello*]

Wardrobe Man: I've already measured that, who're you working for?

More blatantly, "pansies" or "fairies" would sometimes appear in comic sketches as minor characters—floorwalkers, theater stage managers, window dressers, or other occupations and roles commonly identified as "feminine." Jack Benny hired "Killer" Hogan as a bodyguard in one show (15 Dec. 1940), but it's made clear from the character's effeminate delivery that he's ill suited for the job. Mary Livingstone renames Hogan "Ecstasy" and comments to Jack that the employment agency must have sent him a manicurist by mistake. >

With pseudocamp nonchalance, "fairy" characters would frequently deliver whimsical non sequiturs in a high pitch or lisping tones, generating squeals of laughter from a studio audience that clearly delighted more in identifying the sexual invert rather than understanding the cryptic references. Jack Benny went to a department store to buy Mary a present in one episode (5 Dec. 1954):

Benny: Oh, that must be the floorwalker over there, the man in striped trousers and a cutaway coat. Oh, mister, mister!

Floorwalker: (*Exaggerated*) Yeeeessssss.

(*Audience laughter*)

Benny: Are you the floorwalker?

Floorwalker: No, I'm a pallbearer, but my handle broke.

(*Big audience laughter*)

Benny: I didn't come here for corny conversation. All I want to know is where I can buy a negligee.

Floorwalker: On the third floor. But I don't think they have anything in your size.

In situations such as this, the queer voice merely contributed to the feeling of madcap comedy, and commonly permitted the lead characters to distance themselves from queerness by commenting to each other on how strange or odd these fellows were (see also McFadden 128). Another example from *The Jack Benny Program* (1 Dec. 1940):

Benny: Mr. Billingsly, what are you doing under the bed?

Billingsly: I'm looking for my cloud, have you seen it?

Benny: Your . . . cloud? No, I haven't.

Billingsly: Well, if it comes by, duck—it's just full of rain.

(Audience laughter)

Benny: *(With inflection)* Oh, I will, I will. . . . Good night, Mr. Billingsly.

Billingsly: Not necessarily!

(Audience laughter—Billingsly exits)

Benny: Jeez . . . he's a weird fella. I'm nervous.

Sometimes the lead male characters would themselves “go swish”—a term used to describe any recognizable performance or temporary adoption of a homosexual persona. To momentarily go swish worked as an entertainment strategy because its codes were widely understood by the audience. The pansy figure constituted a stable reference point as that which was recognizably outrageous within the real world of the everyday. Transgender behavior in a male triggered an elaborate chain of meaning and expectation around an identifiably bizarre character: witty dialogue, an ironic attitude, a constant undercurrent of sex and sexuality. While the physical portrayal of feminine manners invited derision, swish also allowed male comedians to invoke alternative observations and unlicensed behaviors that were culturally unavailable and impermissible to their straight characters.

Several social theorists have made connections between gay camp and black soul, suggesting that both are critical resources that subordinated populations draw upon to cope with dominant culture (for example, see Robertson 20). Reinflecting this comparison, playing swish by straight performers was a form of aural cross-dressing that can be regarded as a parallel to blackface—a comic device of temporarily adopting a signifier of difference in order to identify a character as “other.” Both swish and blackface were time-honored strategies that were developed in vaudeville to justify controlled inversions of things as usual. Although most commonly recognized through costuming and makeup, the swish routine was less reliant on drag regalia than blackface was on burnt cork, and hence was easier to activate. Performers could exhibit their virtuosity by slipping into pansy mode through gestures and vocal tone alone.

Whereas blackface was primarily intended to invoke an assumed stupidity or false erudition for its characters, swish triggered a complex interplay of aptitudes. There existed a begrudging respect and fascination for the fairy's verbal acumen and propensity for queer vision—the capacity to understand the world from an acute perspective, communicate in tragicomic double language, and outwit adversaries through linguistic mastery. But abnormality, vanity, physical frailty, and dysfunction were also integrally connected to pansy tropes in straight culture, as Alexander Doty has noted. This positioned their bearer as the butt of homophobic laughter, a comic form of gay-bashing.)

It could be argued that by disturbing the domestic logic of gender and sexuality, swish routines made audible a discredited existence and implied that the vacillation between straight man and gay man might be successfully undertaken without reprisal. Such an approach conflates comic inversion with social subversion, however, and fails to account for the multiple ways in which gayness was rendered audible in radio comedy in order to be ridiculed. Going swish signified heterosexual supremacy and masculine mastery as much as gender uncertainty. When radio comedians went swish, they were appropriating and reversing the gay survival strategy of "passing" (i.e., the ability to go unnoticed and appear to be "normal") and converting it into a comic strategy of performing abnormality. In such instances, the straight performer benefited either way: to successfully and temporarily pass as homosexual was a display of comic agility; to fail to appear convincing was to recuperate and reaffirm one's innate and indomitable masculinity. Swish involved a temporary imitation of difference, therefore, one that was humorous to the audience because it could safely assume that the comedic transgression would soon be straightened out and normal transmission would resume shortly.

Other distancing devices were employed to mollify the potentially destabilizing impact of gay references and representations in radio comedy. Innocent or asexual characters were used to render innocuous apparent expressions of gay desire. For example, Dennis Day—long-serving tenor on *The Jack Benny Program*—played the role of naive man-child, still in the formative stages of gender development and hence unaware of the true meaning of his frequent gay quips. In one program, Day is taken to a psychiatrist to discover why he is so "unusual." When the psychiatrist asks him about the first time he became aware of girls, Day responds, ambiguously, "I can hardly wait" (*The Jack Benny Program*, 28 Nov. 1954). An exchange from an earlier program (25 May 1947) went as follows:

Benny: Anyway, Mary, that book Louella Parsons wrote is really swell.

It's called "The Gay Illiterate."

Phil Harris: Hey, wait a minute, Jackson, don't get personal.

[Presumably in response to the idea of stupidity/illiteracy.]

Benny: Phil, I wasn't talking about you. I was just mentioning the title of the book, "The Gay Illiterate."

Dennis Day: Yeah, there's nothing wrong in being gay.

(Audience laughs)

Benny: (Dismissively) Thank you, kid.

Eddie Cantor sometimes wore blackface when he adopted a pansy character. And swish routines in all radio programs were frequently immediately negated through emphatic references to the heterosexuality of the main characters. More often than not, any deeper implications attributed to effeminate behavior or dialogue conveying same-sex adoration were sharply truncated

through discussions of girlfriends and dating, expressions of heterosexual desire, or “spontaneous” laughter coming from the performers—designed to brush off any meaningful interpretation of the lines and reassure the audience that it was just a joke.

Effeminate gentlemen, gay gags, and swish routines were staples of radio’s golden age because they fit its comic logic so well. They were simultaneously provocative and decorous, and thus perfect for the pleasure mechanisms of prime time, which needed to balance comic liberties with regulation. The mannerisms were clearly identifiable, while the strong association of the pansy figure with euphemisms derived from oral delivery allowed scriptwriters to stay one step ahead of the censors by not including anything identifiably illicit or improper. The radio comedians relied upon the flamboyance of the pansy to generate quick laughs, appropriated “passing” in order to slip in and out of swish mode, and embellished their own panoply of nonobscene, airwave-friendly, double-meaning humor through recourse to the loaded verbal repertoire of gay life.

Homosexuality was thus doubly contained—by the limiting regulations of the censors and by the particular mobilization of the comedians. In the process, the specter of homosexuality was vocally let loose in order that it might be contained (see Simpson 139). Lost in all this play was the homosexual subject himself, whose presence was simultaneously contested and displaced—never permitted audibility beyond the comic uses of his sexuality. So whereas the unruly loose woman, in the form of Mae West, had been banished from the radio airwaves altogether, the lavender gentleman lingered in the gaps between official censorship and moral censure. West had directly assaulted the values of the middle class reformers, and hence she, and the femininity she represented, was an easy target for banishment. But the lavender gent was more of a cultural embarrassment to straight reformist sensibilities—good training and cultural sophistication gone awry, lurking on the perimeter of good taste. The censors and reformers could dismiss West as a tawdry example of unrefined culture. The lavender gentleman was not so easily ostracized, and hence had to be invoked as a means of cultural release.

Notes

1. Quoted in *Congressional Record*, vol. 83, pt. 1, 75th Congress, 3rd sess. 562.
2. Vincent de Paul Fitzpatrick, telegram to Lenox Lohr, 14 Dec. 1937, Folder 1, Box 58, NBC Files, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison (henceforth NBC Files); “Tainting the Air,” *The Evangelist* (official Catholic newspaper of the Albany, NY, diocese) 17 Dec. 1937, clipping in NBC Files, Box 58, Folder 1.
3. Janet MacRorie to John Royal, 15 Dec. 1937, Folder 1, Box 58, NBC Files.
4. George C. Guinther to FCC, 18 Jan. 1938, Box 52, E-100B, RG 173 (Federal Communications Commission), National Archives II (henceforth NAI), College Park, Maryland.

5. Anita Bernard to Martha McGrew, 21 Jan. 1938, Folder 44, Box 65, NBC Files.

6. Copy of editorial, 27 Dec. 1937, Folder 1, Box 58, NBC Files.

7. H. N. Ward to FCC, 29 Dec. 1937, Box 52, E-100B, RG 173, NA II.

8. For example, in a 1934 *Radioland* article, West is cited as selecting Cab Calloway and his Cotton Club orchestra, since their "primitive music . . . has sex in it with a capital S" ("Hollywood Stars").

9. This earlier presentation differed from the *Chase & Sanborn* version by following the biblical delineation of the serpent leading Eve astray, rather than vice versa ("Postscript"). Also, the program lacked the prepublicity and public notoriety of the West-Ameche-McCarthy effort, as well as the suggestive vocal inflections which became so central to the *Chase & Sanborn Hour* controversy (Plummer, 15 Jan. 1938). My estimation that black performers were deemed 'naturally' oversexualized is based upon an interpretation of dominant racist discourses of the time and not empirical evidence.

10. Women's reform groups were not homogeneous entities. Some advocated temperance, while others concentrated on welfare reform and political campaigning. The WNRC concerned itself purely with broadcasting matters that its constituent organizations considered universally beneficial ("WCTU"). The WNRC published a periodical, *Radio Review*, selected volumes of which are located at the Broadcast Pioneers Library, College Park, Maryland.

11. Edward J. McHale to Chase & Sanborn, 15 Dec. 1937, copy in Box 52, E-100B, RG 173, NA II.

12. Janet MacRorie to A. C. Love, 18 Aug. 1937, Folder 43, Box 92, NBC Files; see also Hilmes 124–29; on parents' groups' objections to children's serials, see Boemer 7–15.

13. Rudolf Arnheim (20) alternatively theorized that "the essence of broadcasting consists just in the fact that it alone offers unity by aural means." Arnheim's aesthetic preference was that "a wireless broadcast must not be envisaged."

14. Janet MacRorie to Lenox Lohr, 8 Aug. 1938, Folder 40, Box 93, NBC Files.

15. In response to this development, leading dance band orchestra leaders such as Paul Whiteman, Rudy Vallee, and Guy Lombardo (all of whom aimed to "uplift" popular music through classical musical forms) collaborated to edit questionable lyrics themselves ("Radio's Song").

16. See "Functions of the Continuity Acceptance Department." Folder 42, Box 92, NBC Files; see also "Regulating Radio."

17. Don Gilman to Martha McGrew, 22 Mar. 1937, Folder 42, Box 92, NBC Files.

18. Knight describes MacRorie in terms that discursively link radio censorship, the home, and social hygiene: "To her mind radio is a sort of window into an outside world, which may be opened to let in fresh air and sunlight, and closed to shut out unpleasant weather, dirt, and street noises. Her duty is to delete the unpleasantness and encourage opening the window" (50).

19. Havig (99–123) shows that MacRorie and her staff were never able to enforce their provisions completely.

20. Janet MacRorie to Bertha Brainard, 18 Aug. 1937, Folder 43, Box 92, NBC Files.

21. John Swallow, telegram to John Royal, 14 Dec. 1937, Folder 1, Box 58, NBC Files.

22. Ibid.

23. Don Gilman, telegram to Lenox Lohr, 15 Dec. 1937, Folder 1, Box 58, NBC Files.

24. NBC Report, Folder 1, Box 58, NBC Files.

25. UP Report, 27 Dec. 1937, Folder 1, Box 58, NBC Files.

26. Frank McNinch to Lenox Lohr, 14 Jan. 1938, Folder 36, Box 64, NBC Files.

27. Janet MacRorie to Lenox Lohr, 26 Dec. 1937, Folder 43, Box 92, NBC Files; Kaufman.

28. "Radio Is Human, Too!" 1938, Folder 37, Box 93, NBC Files.

29. For example, in early 1939 the head of NBC's Women's Division encouraged the vice president of programming to further cooperate with leaders of women's associations: "We can get their backing easily. All they want is to be wanted and recognized. In times of trouble

they would be our strongest allies because they believe in the freedom of the air, industry and the American system." Margaret Cuthbert to John Royal, 27 Mar. 1939, Folder 51, Box 68, NBC Files.

30. Bertha Brainard to John Swallow, 17 June 1935, Folder 33, Box 34, NBC Files.

31. Janet MacRorie to John F. Royal, 21 Oct. 1935, Folder 12, Box 91, NBC Files; "Thou Shalt."

32. Sidney Strotz to Messrs Carlin. et al., 17 Dec. 1940, Folder 25, Box 95, NBC Files.

33. "Radio Is Human, Too!" 1938, Folder 37, Box 93, NBC Files.

34. Janet MacRorie to Messrs. Witmer and Kobak, 19 Dec. 1940, Folder 14, Box 95, NBC Files; C. L. Menser to Hal Metzger, 21 Jan. 1941, Folder 83, Box 95, NBC Files.

35. The anxiety surrounding homosexuality on radio continued long after the period under examination here. For example, upon hearing a complaint against a California radio station in 1964, FCC commissioner Robert E. Lee declared that "the airing of a program dealing with sexual aberrations is not to my mind per se a violation of good taste. . . . But a panel of eight homosexuals discussing their experiences and past history does not approach the treatment of a delicate subject one could expect by a responsible broadcaster" (qtd. in Powe 170).

36. In 1935 FCC chairman Anning Prall outlined his "determination to free the air of objectionable programs and strengthen friendly radio reception in the American home" ("Air Showmen").

37. Hugo Stauffenegger to FCC, Dec. 1941, Box 186, RG 173, NA II.

38. The "problem" was magnified by the new medium's visual element. In February 1952 the television critic for the *New York World Telegram and Sun* complained about the prevalence of the use of "exaggerations of homo-sexual mannerisms as the basis of humor," concluding, "Maybe it's funny. Maybe the kids like it, as they like other odd phenomena such as marijuana. I don't" (qtd. in CART Report, 26 February 1952, M95-105, NBC Files). NBC's Continuity Acceptance Department had attempted to delete all swish "portraits" on television from its earliest days as a mass medium. Continuity Acceptance prescreened scripts that seemed open to such interpretation—requiring assurances from producers that "pansy treatment" would not be inserted, and monitoring sketches that seemed to call for a "swishy manner." Over the space of a few years, such interventions were undertaken for most of NBC's leading comedians: Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, Milton Berle, Eddie Cantor, Jack Carson, Kay Kyser, Sid Caesar, and Olsen and Johnson. Occasionally, as documented for the *Lambs' Gambol Show* and *Stop Me If You've Heard This One*, the talent proved uncooperative, ad-libbing swish interpretations during live, on-air productions (CART Reports, 6 Dec. 1948, 14 Dec. 1948, 10 May 1949, 9 Mar. 1949, 27 Sept. 1949, 14 June 1950, M95-105, NBC Files; see also letters to the FCC, Folder 44-3, Box 53 [Colgate-Palmolive/Bob Hope], Folder 76-1, Box 85 [Oscar Levant], Folder 44-3, Box 61 [Milton Berle], RG 173, NA II).

39. The phrase "imaginative astonishment" is taken from Jenkins 61.

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CHAPTER 8**POISONS, POTIONS, AND PROFITS****Radio Rebels and the Origins of the Consumer Movement**

Kathy M. Newman

Nader. He's like a Don Quixote. He's been tilting at windmills for years. Certainly, he is admired. There wouldn't have been a consumer movement without him.

—Jim Colodny, old-time New York leftist, June 2000

RALPH NADER IS THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE figure associated with the consumer movement today; his influential *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the Automobile Industry* (1965) shook the auto industry to its core, and Nader has not slowed down since. Next to Nader *Consumer Reports* is the publication most of us would associate with the consumer movement—if we think about it at all. In the fall of the year 2000, however, the consumer movement was making headlines: 6% of Americans told pollsters they would vote for Ralph Nader for president, and under consumerist pressure, Ford and Firestone recalled hundreds of thousands of tires and apologized to the world for their defects.

At the same time, when Jim Colodny, quoted above, asserted that “there wouldn't have been a consumer movement without [Nader],” it is quite possible that the eighty-four-year-old activist was old enough to know better. Few of us today realize that Nader did not start the consumer movement in the 1960s; rather, he inherited it from the 1930s activists who started *Consumer Reports*, fought for some of the nation's first consumer protections, and railed against the advertising industry (Dunne).

The consumer movement of the Depression era was a progressive and sometimes radical coalition of educators, writers, workers, housewives, and technicians who began to question certain facets of capitalism from the perspective of the consumer. The movement was both inspired by the practices of radio advertising and an attempt to reform them. The movement failed, however, to transform commercial radio in the 1930s. As Susan Smulyan and Robert McChesney have documented, the most serious popular threats to commercial radio were quashed by 1935. But legislative and structural losses on the part of consumer activists did not silence the voices of those who continued to argue that commercial radio was controlled by business interests, damaging to American democracy, and hard on the ears.

As a result, failure is not the only lesson to be learned from the many consumerist rants against radio that were written during the Depression decade. Through these texts, and the lives of the people who wrote them, we can begin to see that the critique of radio advertising was foundational to the consumer movement. Radio advertising, while it was designed to make consumers buy, sometimes made them balk. And when they balked, they often became involved in progressive coalitions to change more than what they heard over the air.

In what follows I examine the relationship between the consumer movement and advertising during the Depression decade. Next I examine three radio rebels and their involvement in the consumer movement. I look at James Rorty, a recovering adman and sometimes Communist; Ruth Brindze, whose *Not to Be Broadcast* (1937) was one of the most widely circulated critiques of radio in the 1930s; and Peter Morell, who wrote *Poisons, Potions and Profits*; Morell's disgust with radio turned him from a labor playwright into a consumer agitator.

These three author-activists each represent a different kind of radio critique, as well as a different kind of consumer activism. Rorty was the model of the left-wing intellectual who was attracted to a wide variety of radical movements—many of which he critiqued as severely as he did capitalism. Brindze was typical of the grassroots consumer activist—she was a leader of consumer organizations and a chronicler of the movement. Morell represented a breed of left-leaning cultural producers who turned to the consumer movement as a way to secure more democratic access to the dramatic medium of radio.

What united these three authors was their ability to see the relationship between radio, capitalism, and class. Rorty argued that advertising, and especially radio advertising, was inextricably linked to capitalism. Brindze, from her perspective as a journalist and activist, saw radio advertising as an institution that prevented workers from having access to radio airtime. And Morell, as a pro-labor playwright, imagined that only a powerful consumer movement made up of white-collar and industrial workers could cure what ailed the airwaves. Rorty was more of an economic critic and Brindze focused on radio and politics, while Morell focused on the relationship between radio and culture. Each of these

authors, in their own way, saw the possibilities for a cross-class movement of consumer-workers whose collective power could overthrow the most corrosive and undemocratic features of a capitalist-controlled radio system. The fact that their visions were never realized is not as interesting as the visions themselves: their radio critiques were foundational to their identity as political activists. Moreover, their writings help us to see the ways in which advertising—and especially radio advertising—helped to shape the consumer movement as a whole.

Advertising and the Consumer Movement

Colston Warne, one of the founders of the consumer movement, argued that advertising was responsible for its “birth” as well as its “growth.” What he meant by this was not that advertisers themselves created the movement, but rather that progressive coalitions organized to fight advertising were among the first to identify themselves as consumer activists. In the 1920s mass advertising was still a relatively new industry, but its effects were widespread, and many resented the practices of deception deployed by the “mirror makers.” Two of the first outspoken opponents of mass advertising were Stuart Chase and F. J. Schlink. Chase, an economist who was fired from the Federal Trade Commission for his “liberal” politics, and Schlink, a mechanical engineer who had worked for US Bureau of Standards, published a controversial book in 1927 called *Your Money's Worth: A Study in the Waste of the Consumer's Dollar*, which advocated the formation of a federally sponsored product testing agency. This agency, they argued, would make the need for advertising as a source of consumer information obsolete. With the success of *Your Money's Worth*, Chase and Schlink set up a consumer testing agency of their own in White Plains, New York, and called it Consumers' Research, Inc. Schlink, along with fellow activist Arthur Kallet, published another popular exposé of advertising and manufacturing in 1933, called *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs: Dangers in Everyday Foods, Drugs, and Cosmetics* (Fox 122; Marchand 314).

A strike of employees at Consumers' Research in 1935 led to the formation of a rival testing bureau, Consumers Union, which published its findings in a bulletin called *Consumer Reports*. By the end of the 1930s the publications of these two testing bureaus had a combined readership of 140,000, and there were more than forty-two consumer organizations across thirty states. These organizations represented diverse constituencies: women's groups (National Federation of Women's Clubs), pro-labor consumer groups that used consumer pressure to improve working conditions (National Consumers League), consumer cooperatives (Consumer Farmer-Milk Cooperative), and home economics educators (American Home Economics Associations). Some were short-lived and others lasted thirty to forty years, while others, such as the American Home Economics Association, Consumers' Research, and Consumers Union, are still active today (Glickman; Gelston).

And thus the very first “movements” of the consumer movement were focused on advertising—criticizing it, coming up with alternatives to it (in the form of consumer testing bureaus), and fighting for federal legislation that would regulate it. Consumer organizations provided an alternative source of consumer education, enlightening their members about false/misleading advertising, or engaging them in legislative campaigns. In a sense, the publications of Consumers’ Research and Consumers Union *competed* with advertising. These publications exposed bad products, but they also promoted good ones. A good review in *Consumer Reports* was often the best “advertising” a product could hope for.

As far as actually changing the advertising industry the consumer movement boasted two legislative victories during the Depression: (1) the Copeland bill, which was passed in 1938, giving the FDA “new powers over the sale and manufacture of drugs”; (2) the Wheeler-Lea Amendments to the Federal Trade Commission Act, which also were passed in 1938, made “deceptive acts of commerce” (false advertising) illegal. These amendments also gave the FTC the power to seek injunctions—the most famous of which was brought against Fleischmann’s Yeast: the FTC forced the company to cease claiming that Fleischmann’s Yeast “cured crooked teeth, bad skin, constipation, and halitosis” (Fox 168).

These legislative victories were minor, however, compared to the power of the consumer movement that business and advertising leaders *imagined*. In 1940 *Advertising Age* declared that the consumer movement “has now indubitably moved into the position of the number one problem of American business” (Sorenson 179). The consumer movement was threatening for three reasons: (1) consumer activists linked their critique of advertising to a critique of capitalism as a whole, (2) they frequently threatened collective action, and (3) they represented an emerging white-collar class that was sympathetic to labor (Dameron 239).

Business leaders were right on the first point: the consumerist critique of advertising was, at times, an attack on capitalism. But in truth, collective organization was rarely achieved by the consumer movement. According to one historian, beyond these individual campaigns, the movement was made up of “an unorganized mass of individuals—teachers, office workers, labor union members, [and] liberal publicists,” who “read the proliferating consumer literature and sympathized with its goals” (Fox 124–25). Ironically, perhaps, what defined the movement as a unified force was more the antagonism that it generated among business leaders.

Business leaders were also rightly fearful of the tentative alliance that seemed to be forming between organized labor and white-collar professionals. Not only did some consumer activists threaten to use the tactics of organized labor, such as the boycott, but many consumer groups embraced labor unions. Educators were at the forefront of the movement: a Gallup poll in 1939 showed that 83% of teachers had read a consumerist book and 87% of teachers wanted

stricter laws to control advertising. Business leaders did not want to alienate an emerging professional middle class, of which teachers were an important part. As historian Stephen Fox has argued, “Even if advertising did not sell much to this sector, it could not keep offending these articulate, politically active citizens” (Fox 126).

Meanwhile, as radio increased in cultural and economic importance, radio advertising became one of the chief targets for consumer activists. If advertising was responsible for the “birth” of the consumer movement, as Colston Warne has argued, then radio advertising contributed to its development throughout the 1930s. The writings of Rorty, Brindze, and Morell contained the consumerist threats that business leaders most feared: Rorty critiqued advertising as an essential component of capitalism, Brindze’s writings hinted at the possibilities for collective action, and Morell, as a middle-class playwright, advocated the formation of a cross-class consumer alliance.

James Rorty and the Economics of Radio Advertising

*Do you ask for bread? I give you
Not bread, but the wine of power;
The tread of strong men marching,
The inevitable hour.*

—James Rorty, “Ballad of the Breadlines,” 1932

Like so many twentieth-century admen, James Rorty was a frustrated poet. Born in Middletown, New York, in 1890, Rorty attended college at Tufts University. After graduating, Rorty moved to New York City in 1913 “determined to embark on a literary career.” When this plan failed, Rorty’s brother secured him a job at the H. K. McCann advertising agency. Rorty claims he was nearly fired for resisting the whims of a client; he escaped this fate by joining the army in 1917 (Pope 10).

After the war Rorty roomed in the same boarding house as Thorstein Veblen. According to historian Daniel Pope, it was in these shared quarters that Rorty “regaled Veblen with macabre tales of the machinations of Madison Avenue.” The theoretical influence of Veblen on Rorty’s career, claims Pope, would last a lifetime. In 1920, newly married to social worker Maria Lambin, Rorty turned to the advertising trade in San Francisco. But soon his marriage crumbled and he took ill, and in 1924 Rorty returned to Manhattan, now smitten with Winifred Rauschenbush, the daughter of social gospel minister Walter Rauschenbush (Pope 7).

Rorty married Winifred and went back to the advertising grind in New York City. This time Rorty found the business harder to stomach: “I returned to my advertising vomit, prodding my fair white soul up and down Madison Avenue and offering it for sale to the highest bidder.” Meanwhile Rorty was creeping

increasingly leftward, becoming, in 1926, one of the founding editors of the *New Masses*, along with Mike Gold, Joseph Freeman, and Egmont Arens (Pope 8).

In December 1930, with the Depression in full force, Rorty was fired from the BBDO advertising agency. He was elated: "I'm a human being again, and seldom have I felt so cheerful." Rorty spent the early 1930s fighting on the cultural front—he joined the New York chapter of the John Reed Club, protested Hoover's policy toward poverty, and became secretary of the group promoting the Communist presidential ticket: "The League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford." According to Pope, it was during this time that Rorty coauthored a pamphlet called "Culture and the Crisis," which urged "'brainworkers' to ally with 'muscle workers' in supporting the Party slate." In the early 1930s Rorty could imagine the possibilities for a movement that would unite intellectuals and laborers (Pope 8–10).

Rorty wrote two important critiques of advertising in 1934. The most comprehensive, *Our Master's Voice: Advertising*, was part autobiography, part mass media critique, and part economic philosophy. Though Rorty devoted only one chapter of *Our Master's Voice* to radio, in the same year he authored a short pamphlet called *Order on the Air!* This pamphlet, which was more oriented toward consumer activism and radio reform, was a reaction to what Rorty called the "drunk and disorderly" state of radio advertising (Rorty, *Order* 7). These critiques are important because through them we can see the ways in which advertising, and especially radio advertising, was linked to capitalism as an economic system. Rorty proved that they were connected; in criticizing the one (radio advertising) he criticized the other (capitalism).

Rorty, as a veteran of the advertising industry, had a unique insight into its inner workings. His economic critique was directed, ironically, at people like himself—at the multiplying professionals associated with the advertising industry. In this group he included admen, printers, illustrators, script writers, announcers, and magazine editors—everyone who produced advertising or entertainment for the mass media. Rorty argued that the adman was not entirely responsible for the degradation of his craft but rather was carrying out the orders of capitalism: "Behind him is the whole pressure of the capitalist organism, which must sell or perish" (Rorty, *Our Master's Voice*, 44). Capitalism, Rorty argued, needed its own class of intellectuals, and the adman answered the call:

He is, on the average, much more intelligent than the average business man, much more sophisticated, even much more socially minded. . . . [Advertising men] are, in a sense, the intellectuals . . . of our American commercial culture.

Some, he argued became morons. Some became "gray faced cynics." Some became so depressed they "jump[ed] out of high windows." And, finally, some became "extreme political and social radicals, either secretly while they [were] in the business, or openly, after they have left it." Rorty found himself in this

final category. Advertising, without meaning to, had turned Rorty into a Red (Rorty, *Our Master's Voice*, 19).

Rorty saw that advertising, while it served industry, was becoming an industry itself. He understood that advertising was more than simply a function of the “superstructure”—advertising was becoming essential to the capitalist mode of production:

Advertising on the grand scale ha[s] become an industry no less essential than coal or steel. It ha[s] become a profession endorsed, sanctified and subsidized by dozens of Greek-porticoed “Schools of Business Administration” in which a new priesthood of “business economists” translate the techniques of mass prevarication into suitable academic euphemisms. . . . The ad-man ha[s] become the first lieutenant of the new Caesars of America’s . . . imperium, *not merely on the economic front but also on the cultural front.*

In other words, Rorty argued, advertising men were beginning to play a key role in the cultural and economic life of the nation (Rorty, *Our Master's Voice*, 320).

But Rorty’s economic critique of radio was also directed at the listener. He sneered at the naiveté of radio listeners who thought of their entertainment as “free”:

[T]he radio listener pays, and pays heavily by lending his ears . . . to the tiresome and frequently disingenuous and deceptive sales talk of radio advertisers. In the second place, he pays by submitting to the countless varieties of censorship and propaganda which are the business-as-usual of commercial broadcasting. . . . In the third place, he pays for his receiving set, for keeping it in repair, and for the current it uses.

With this passage Rorty anticipated by many years the media criticism of Dallas Smythe, who argued in the 1970s that “attention,” along with the money spent on receivers and repair, become the “cost” of the mass media to the consumer (Smythe 27). Rorty reported that radio set owners spent \$300 million a year on buying and repairing their radio sets, while broadcasters spent no more than \$80 million to produce radio programs. In other words, listeners invested six times more than broadcasters in the business of radio (Rorty, *Order*, 27–28). With this critique Rorty exposed the myth that radio was “free”; he showed how capitalism had become a fundamental part of radio listening.

Readers got the message. Many reviewers noted that *Our Master's Voice* was written as a critique of capitalism, above all:

Written by a former ad-man the book is a vigorous indictment of modern American advertising methods. Mr. Rorty argues that our whole

acquisitive economy is bound up with advertising, newspaper, periodical press and radio, and that so long as competitive capitalism remains, advertising cannot be materially reformed.¹

Rorty's former advertising boss interpreted *Our Master's Voice* in a similar manner. Roy Durstine, the *D* in BBDO, saw *Our Master's Voice* as an attack on "our present conditions" and "our competitive economic system" (Durstine 26, 69).

But if advertising could not be reformed without transforming capitalism, why did Rorty write *Order on the Air!*—a distinctly reformist text concluding with a series of activist recommendations? Lawrence Glickman has argued that Rorty, as a founding member of the consumer movement, favored an organized, activist movement over the technical, bureaucratic model favored by rival members, and thus Rorty called for such radio reforms as the "elimination of advertising sales talk" on the radio, the "freeing" of radio from its corporate bondage, and the "effective utilization" of radio by educators, writers, critics, artists, physicians, scientists, and health workers. He also wanted "minority" groups—such as women, African Americans, and labor groups—to be able to use radio for "political, economic and social educations, propoganda, and agitation." Rorty, though he was skeptical of the possibilities for radio reform, still wanted radio to be a medium available to progressive activists and educators. Curmudgeon that he was, and anti-Communist that he became, James Rorty was a consumer activist committed to the principles of collective action (Glickman 8; Rorty, *Order* 28–30).

By the time Rorty wrote his radio critiques he was already starting to break with the Communist Party. In the late 1920s he had been ousted from the Communist group that founded the *New Masses*, and in 1932 "his anger with the Communist party flare[d] up again." Later in life he referred to his former organization, the League of Professional Groups, as the "League of Professional Gropers." Furthermore, like so many left-leaning intellectuals of this period, he became increasingly anti-Communist; in 1954 he argued that anti-Communism would be a more successful movement without the demagoguery of Senator McCarthy. Toward the end of his life his hatred for Communism had evolved into a paranoia:

By the 1960s Rorty was convinced that the Communist Party had planted its agents as handymen on his Connecticut farm, had joined forces against him with Morris Fishbein of the American Medical Association, and had induced fellow-traveling bookstores to hide his writings from display.

Rorty did become an anti-Communist, but, as Pope argues, he remained an anticapitalist. Moreover, his experiences as an adman throughout the teens and twenties gave him a unique insight into the emergence of consumer capitalism

and its auxiliary institutions—especially radio (Pope 11, 14; Rorty and Decter, *McCarthy*).

After writing his radio critiques Rorty continued to work on behalf of the consumer movement. He edited *Consumer's Defender* for two years, from 1935 to 1936, and devoted much of the rest of his life to medical and ecological reforms. His interest in medical reform late in his life might have influenced the way he looked back at his early critique of advertising. In his journal in 1962 he wrote that *Our Master's Voice* had failed to “cure” the disease of advertising: “Not only did I not cure it; the disease like cancer increased not only relatively to the total culture but absolutely so that one might well say that the American culture is dying from this malignancy” (qtd. in Pope 14). In 1962 Rorty may have felt as though American culture was dying and diseased, and he may have been paranoid that Communists were lurking in his backyard, but his commitment to left politics was still strong. After his break with the Communist Party he continued to write progressive tracts, such as *American Medicine Mobilizes* (1939), *Brother Jim Crow* (1943), *Tomorrow's Food: The Coming Revolution in Nutrition* (1947), and *We Open the Gates: Labor's Fight for Equality* (1958). As Daniel Pope has argued, Rorty's turn to medicine, nutrition, and ecology allowed him to establish a position outside of the mainstream of American culture—he remained the consummate anticorporate critic.²

Meanwhile, Rorty's criticisms of radio advertising in 1934 did not fall entirely on deaf ears. His call for the establishment of a government bureau to regulate radio was realized by Roosevelt's creation of the Federal Communication Commission. On the whole, however, his critique of radio advertising—while it resonated with a larger movement for radio reform—did not win the day. Advertising secured complete control of the radio industry, and by 1935 even the most fervent antiadvertising warriors admitted they were defeated (McChesney 252–70).

Ruth Brindze: Radio and Political Freedom

Accepting defeat, however, was another matter. Radio advertising continued to annoy, anger, and provoke consumer activists. In 1937 Ruth Brindze expanded Rorty's critique with an attack of her own, *Not to Be Broadcast: The Truth about Radio*. Brindze was the archetype of the 1930s consumer activist. She was in her thirties, well educated, and chair of the Consumer's Council of Westchester County, New York. She was politically active, a prodigious writer, and concerned about everything consumerist, from the dangers of radio censorship to the best way to distinguish silk from rayon. While the most notorious figures associated with the consumer movement were men—such as Schlink, Kallet, and Chase—the majority of its grassroots activists were women. These women, by participating in the consumer movement, turned their private consumption into political action.

Brindze was born in Harlem in 1903 “when goats were still grazing in the streets.”³ “Entranced by books,” she learned to read at a young age, and thus began a love affair with the printed page. Brindze reflected on her childhood in an autobiography she wrote for young readers in 1963:

In addition to reading, playing ball and swimming, I enjoyed writing and compositions about things experienced and imagined. During my high school days some books I read on the romantic aspects of newspaper work made me decide to be a reporter, and in preparation for a newspaper career I spent my last two years of college at the Columbia University School of Journalism. However, I worked on newspapers for only a few years and then began to write magazine articles and books. (Brindze, “Autobiographical,” 29–30)

After Brindze graduated from Columbia she started her writing career as a “ghost writer” for celebrity “autobiographies.” Later, as a resident of New Rochelle, Westchester County, New York, she wrote for the *New Rochelle Standard Star* and the *Larchmont Times*. By the early 1930s she was a regular contributor to *The Nation*. She was also tapped by Roosevelt’s administration to lead the Westchester County Consumers’ Council. And in 1935, at the age of thirty-two, she published her first book—a contribution to the literature of the consumer movement called *How to Spend Money: Everybody’s Practical Guide to Buying*.⁴

Her first effort at consumer propaganda combined radical political critique with practical advice. She advised readers on how to buy such varied goods as fabric, men’s suits, hosiery, mattresses, canned fish, and ice cream. While Brindze advocated collective action for the consumer, she also stressed the importance of individual action: “Until consumers are sufficiently organized to force Uncle Sam . . . to establish consumer standards and to enforce them, the individual consumer can serve himself and the cause by intelligent buying.” Brindze self-consciously patterned her book after *Your Money’s Worth* and *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*. Without these “pioneers,” argued Brindze, “it is doubtful if the consumer would have received even the meager attention he now commands.” She also argued that once consumers informed themselves about how to get the best deals, their “word-of-mouth” advertising could be “more potent than a nation-wide hook-up of the mightiest broadcasting station in the land.” In other words, the rabble—if organized—could function as an alternative human broadcast system (Brindze, *How to Spend Money* 12, 14).

With *How to Spend Money*, which was praised for being “practical and sensible,” Brindze launched the next phase of her career as a consumer advocate (Van Doren 23). In October 1935 *The Nation* announced that Brindze would be writing a consumer column for the weekly, explaining that consumer news was frequently excluded from daily newspapers, which were dependent on advertising for their revenues:

Beginning next week, therefore, *The Nation* will publish a department to appear bi-weekly under the direction of Ruth Brindze, author of "How to Spend Money," which summarizes significant reports of the Federal Trade Commission, the Bureau of Standards, the Consumers' Advisory Board, the Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration, and the American Medical Association.⁵

Brindze's subsequent columns kept readers informed about a wide variety of consumer issues: the ban of an anti-obesity drug, Marmola; the difference between a "sealskin," made of real seal, and a "Hudson sealskin," made of muskrat; the threats to the power of the Federal Trade Commission; the rising price of milk; the corruption of radio advertising; and the competition between radio broadcasting and the newspaper press.⁶

While researching a series of *Nation* articles on radio, Brindze began to write *Not to Be Broadcast*, which was published in 1937. Like Rorty, Brindze questioned the economic structure of radio advertising and the fact that Americans had surrendered radio to "the money rulers of America." But Brindze took her criticism of radio censorship further than Rorty had, putting the issues of free speech and politics at the heart of her critique. *Not to Be Broadcast* functioned as a virtual encyclopedia of radio censorship during the Depression (Brindze, *Not to Be Broadcast* 11).

Brindze was especially critical of the role that pro-business radio agencies and radio monopolies played in preventing certain political viewpoints—especially those of labor—from reaching the airwaves. She cited one incident in which the Federal Radio Commission targeted the socialist radio station WEVD (named for Eugene V. Debs) for broadcast license review. WEVD operators refused to show that their "continued operation would serve the public interest" on the grounds that there should be "at least one [radio] channel . . . open to the uses of the workers (Brindze, *Not to Be Broadcast* 152). In the end, WEVD was allowed to continue broadcasting—albeit on a less desirable channel. Meanwhile, the Radio Commission denied the application of WCFL—the AFL's radio station in Chicago, Illinois—to increase its broadcast hours beyond 6:00 P.M. In order to secure a clear channel for evening broadcasting, WCFL had to take its case to Congress. After months of lobbying and compromise the station was finally able to broadcast during the evening hours (Brindze, *Not* 153).

Brindze was also critical of the difficulties workers faced in getting their viewpoints broadcast during a strike. She cited the case of a group of GE workers in Schenectady who were voting between a company union and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The Radio Workers' Union asked permission to argue their case over radio station WGY—a station owned by GE and managed by the National Broadcasting Company. "The request was denied on the grounds that the controversy was of only "local interest" (Brindze, *Not to Be*

Broadcast 182). In another case, striking elevator workers in New York City in 1936 were able to use WEVD to get their message out—while their employer used the biggest commercial stations in Manhattan, WABC and WJZ. These incidents, Brindze noted, were not limited to the censorship of labor activists. Radio censorship was also used to thwart consumer activists. She recounted an incident in which the Utility Consumers League was prevented from broadcasting a speech attacking telephone rates over radio station WNEW. Worse still, the editor who accepted the program was fired (Brindze, *Not to Be Broadcast* 183, 177).

Brindze reserved some of her harshest criticisms for corporate “goodwill” programming. Her prime target was Henry Ford, whose radio programs she excoriated in a chapter titled “His Master’s Voice.” According to Brindze, the weekly music program sponsored by Ford, which was hosted by William J. Cameron, performed a subtle kind of propagandizing on the “peepul.” The program, she admitted, was very popular: “The praise of the music has been lavish and the enthusiasm for Mr. Cameron’s Sunday night sermons inspires two thousand fans to write him every day.” However, what made this program so insidious, according to Brindze, was that even though the show was broadcast without commercial breaks, Cameron made frequent favorable references to Ford, “the Ford methods, or to the superlative advantages enjoyed by Ford workers.” The ultimate goal of these programs, Brindze argued, was to mold the social and economic viewpoint of the audience “to the Ford pattern” (Brindze, *Not to Be Broadcast* 99, 201, 97).

With this critique Brindze explained the relationship between radio, capitalism, and the working class. She showed how those with the least access to capital—labor unions and consumer activists—also had the least access to radio as a means of political communication. Moreover, with her example of the Ford music program, she showed how the commodity form had infiltrated the pleasure of listening. Not only was radio being used to sell goods, it was also being used to make consumers. And, as Brindze argued, these consumers, like the Model Ts and Model As that Ford had to sell, were being assembled according to the Ford pattern. Radio was not just making music: it was making people.

Brindze hoped that her book would “arouse” these very same people to revolt against radio censorship. She believed that listener resistance to radio propaganda would provide the best defense against a capital-controlled radio system:

How is this subversive material to be controlled? The answer, and an entirely unsatisfactory one, is only by the final censorship of the radio audience itself. Only by turning the dial, only by refusing to listen to these fake patriots, can their rising power be checked.

Brindze, while on one hand patronizing a potential audience of worker-listeners, calling them the “peepul” and criticizing them for buying into the Ford music hour, was a populist in another sense. She knew that the reform of radio

lay in collective action—in the collective rejection of the economics of radio advertising by “average” listeners (Brindze, *Not to Be Broadcast* 82–83).

Not to Be Broadcast was widely read, widely reviewed, and widely praised. The most flattering assessment of the book appeared in *Literary Digest*. In the accompanying photograph Brindze appeared girlish and thin, with short dark hair and wide brown eyes. But her sweet appearance belied the harsh tone of her attack on radio. *Literary Digest* speculated that her book would provoke “hot discussion” on the topic of “freedom of the air”:

The former *Nation* columnist, an avowed Leftist and consumer-defender . . . gathered together all the facts she could find, hammered them into a sharp accusation against the chains, [and] hoped to duplicate the popularity of “100,000,000 Guinea Pigs.”

Brindze was praised for her practical suggestions for reform, which included “arous[ing] the listening public,” setting up a chain of government-owned stations, requiring stations to disclose their financial backers, providing free airtime for minority groups, and limiting chain ownership to prevent monopoly (“Air Arguments,” 33).

After writing *Not to Be Broadcast*, Brindze began to write for a younger audience. In 1938 she wrote a children’s book on consumer spending called *Johnny Get Your Money’s Worth (And Jane, Too!)*:

James Henle, then president of Vanguard Press, encouraged me to write [my first children’s book]. We were discussing a manuscript on consumer buying I had recently completed when I remarked that someone should write a book telling children how to avoid the tricks of the market place. Jim suggested I tackle the job. (Brindze, “Autobiographical” 30)

Though it was aimed at children, *Johnny Get Your Money’s Worth* did not represent a complete break from the concerns of *Not to Be Broadcast*; Brindze included a humorous section on children’s radio, warning children to beware of offers that came over the air. In 1938 Brindze began writing a monthly column for a youth-focused educational magazine, *Scholastic*. In her monthly column, “Getting Your Money’s Worth,” Brindze explained to her high school readers how to choose a fountain pen, how to choose cosmetics, how to lodge a complaint with the Better Business Bureau, and the importance of the Federal Trade Commission.⁷

Brindze was fast becoming one of the most well known consumer writers of the decade. In 1939 she was hailed by the *Journal of Home Economics* as “one of the sanest and most successful writers of consumer guides.”⁸ In this same year she received high praise for *Johnny Get Your Money’s Worth*. Helen Woodward, a reformed advertising copy writer (à la James Rorty), described *Johnny Get Your*



Ruth Brindze, age 34.

Money's Worth as a necessary piece of “household equipment,” assuring readers that even though it was written for children there was “plenty in it for grown-ups” (Woodward 17). Another reviewer noted that Brindze treated her young audience with respect: “Ruth Brindze writes with authority. She also writes with enthusiasm and with a sincere belief that boys and girls are intelligent enough, once they understand the need, to learn to buy wisely and thoughtfully, and thus not only profit themselves, but help to promote honest selling and reliable advertising” (Eaton 10).

Johnny Get Your Money's Worth was the beginning of Brindze's prolific career as a children's book author. Between 1938 and 1975 Brindze wrote seventeen books for children, including the award-winning *Gulf Stream* (1945). Her children's books were less explicitly political than her early works—she wrote about the ocean, the origin of gold, Native American totem poles, and boating. Brindze's turn to children's literature may have been part of a political trend. According to Alan Wald, children's literature was a literary genre adopted by a number of left-wing writers during the McCarthy era. On the other hand, Brindze never completely abandoned her consumerist bent, and continued to write consumer-oriented books throughout the war, including *Daily Bread and Other Foods*, *Stretching Your Dollar in War-Time*, and *You Can Help Your Country Win*

the War. In 1959 she suggested to her publisher, Vanguard Press, that they consider reprinting *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*.⁹ A decade later, in 1968, Brindze wrote a book about the stock market in which she counseled readers on how to influence large corporations by attending shareholders meetings (Wald 483).¹⁰

Though she devoted much of her writing to children, Brindze made a conscious choice never to have children of her own. Her sister-in-law remembers that the Depression was a terrible time to consider bringing children into the world. Brindze was married—she married a lawyer named Albert Fribourg in 1926—five years after meeting him at a game of bridge. The couple was crazy about boating—they even spent their honeymoon in a canoe. While married to Albert Fribourg, however, she remained Ruth Brindze. Friends and family teased her for refusing to take her husband's name. They called her a “Lucy Stoner”—a reference to the Lucy Stone League, a feminist group whose members swore never to change their last names. Moreover, though her first name was Ruth, she was known to her closest friends as “Jim.” No one remembers how she got the nickname, but her sister-in-law speculates that she was from a generation of feminists who sometimes “acted too much like men.”¹¹

At the same time, Brindze and her husband had a close and loving marriage. In 1939 Brindze dedicated her first sailing book to Albert, “my captain—above and below deck” (Brindze, *Seamanship*). In the late 1930s she and her husband moved to Mount Vernon, New York, where they lived for the rest of their lives. Ruth Brindze died in 1984, of a heart attack, while listening to Mozart. Albert, devastated by her death, died four months later.¹²

Albert's grief may account, in part, for the fact that Ruth Brindze is so little remembered today. While she was, by their own admission, one of Vanguard Press's “most important authors,” and her many books were positively reviewed in major newspapers throughout her life, Albert refused to hold a funeral after her death—let alone announce her death to such papers as the *New York Times*. And thus in 1984 there was not so much as an obituary to commemorate the life of this amazing woman.

Brindze was a lifelong consumer activist who, at the beginning of her career, made radio one of the villains in a melodrama about the pitfalls of consumer capitalism. Brindze was active in the consumer movement before she wrote *Not to Be Broadcast*—but *Not to Be Broadcast* was her most radical book, representing her most complete statement of consumer dissatisfaction with the relationship between politics and radio, and thus between culture and capitalism.

Peter Morell and the Culture of Radio Advertising

While Brindze was writing *Not to Be Broadcast* in Westchester County, another melodrama about culture and capitalism was being produced in Harlem. On 26 June 1936, the Negro Unit of the Federal Theatre Project presented *Turpentine*—

a play that narrated the struggle of a group of black workers in the turpentine swamps of central Florida. Peter Morell, a soon-to-be-consumer advocate, was one of the play's authors.

According to Hallie Flanagan, the Federal Theatre Project's brash director, the writing of *Turpentine* "lacked fluency," but "the production possessed breathtaking fervor." The *New York Times* also praised the production:

The authors—J. A. Smith and Peter Morell—have taken as their people the workers in a turpentine camp in Central Florida. It is a story of subjection of the black to the white, and a plea for equality. The workers are starving, underpaid, harshly treated: unionization is the only solution and so they seize it. As played at the Lafayette much of "Turpentine" is exciting as melodrama and just as much is moving as a social document.¹³

Turpentine attracted enthusiastic audiences: "Judging from the warm reception given *Turpentine*, plays of protest against exploitation and oppression anywhere are welcome to Harlem's exploited, oppressed and police-ridden people" (Buttitta and Witham 72; Stevenson 18).

One of the coauthors of *Turpentine*, J. Augustus Smith, was also the star of the play, playing the character Fourty-Four under the stage name of "Gus Smith." Smith was among a team of three black directors chosen to succeed John Houseman as the head of the Negro Unit. As for *Turpentine's* coauthor, Peter Morell, John Houseman described him as Smith's "white collaborator"; another historian wrote that in spite of the fact that Morell had "little dramatic background," he displayed "a desire to reveal what [went] on in the Florida pines." Because of his involvement with Harlem's Lafayette Theater, Morell has frequently been mistaken for a black playwright (Fraden 98; O'Connor and Brown 19; Houseman 98; Bond 169).¹⁴

Though indeed white, Morell did possess some dramatic background. He worked on the short-lived black musical *Africana* in 1933 and wrote a radio play about a group of Harlem actors stranded in the South in 1936. The story of his aborted radio play appeared in a book Morell wrote in 1937—a consumer activist diatribe against radio called *Poisons, Potions and Profits: The Antidote to Radio Advertising*:

Through our agent, Miss Freda Fishbein, we submitted to CBS a continuity which concerned a group of Harlem actors stranded in the deep South and their experiences there. Several of the officials appeared to be enthusiastic about the idea and eventually we were referred to a Miss Singleton. After some consideration she informed us that the radio audience did not like the Harlem type of Negro on the air, and that they preferred the old Southern type of Negro. We disagreed, of

course, and pointed out that it was unfair to confine portrayal of the Negro to the radio audience as a servile buffoon, clown, or in an otherwise menial, degrading role. Miss Singleton quite suddenly became very busy and dropped the discussion. (Morell 239)

And thus Morell's radio play was killed by CBS. Perhaps it was this very experience that drove him into the clutches of the consumer movement to write *Poisons, Potions and Profits*. Morell began his tract by thanking Consumers Union—the more radical of the consumer testing agencies—for permission to use their archives. He also thanked the antiadvertising activist, S. Harry Evans, who at the time was secretary of the National Committee on Education by Radio, "for his many courtesies." In the early 1930s Evans had been one of the most effective lobbyists on behalf of progressive radio reform (McChesney 58–59).

At first glance the connection between Morell's two projects seems remote; *Turpentine* was a story of class and racial struggle against oppressive working conditions, while *Poisons, Potions and Profits* was a story of consumer struggle against misleading advertising claims. But in other ways the projects shared a fundamental logic. *Turpentine* asserted that the revolt of black workers was a direct product of the oppression of a racially dominated capitalist system. In a similar way, *Poisons, Potions and Profits* asserted that a revolt against radio was necessary in order to eliminate the false, annoying, and sometimes dangerous advertising claims. If capitalism could provoke a revolt of workers, could it not also provoke a revolt of consumers? Morell hoped that it would.

Morell was a humorous writer—even his acknowledgments were witty. He explained that his choice of the title "Poisons, Potions and Profits" did not mean that all of the products he criticized were poisonous: "Some are worthless, some are injurious, some are sold through exaggerated advertising claims, and some are unnecessarily expensive." Morell also explained that the ephemeral nature of radio made it difficult for him to obtain transcripts of radio advertisements. He had to resort to a Dictaphone to transcribe the commercials under scrutiny because the radio networks "emphatically refused the author's request" for scripts (Morell [i], [ii]).

The book that resulted from Morell's labors was typical of the literature of the consumer movement. Like *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*, Morell's book enumerated the claims of various consumer goods, and then he debunked them. He attacked the beauty industry, the diet industry, Fleischmann's Yeast, toothpastes, and over-the-counter medicines. But what made Morell's approach unique was that he focused exclusively on products that were advertised on the radio—small, incidental items, such as drugs, tobacco, and cosmetics. These items were cheap to produce, and marketers believed that such items were best suited to the repetitive sales approach that radio advertising had perfected.



Peter Morell in his sixties. This photograph hung on the wall of the famed Manhattan hang-out “Kettle of Fish.” Published with the permission of Valdi Margaret Horgan Morell.

In chapters such as “Beauty at Any Price,” “The Slenderizing Way to Death,” and “Dental Nostrums,” Morell proceeded to deconstruct the claims of the advertisements for the leading sponsors of commercial radio. But in these chapters Morell focused on more than just inadequate products. He also focused on the ads themselves, often reproducing their text in full. His goal was to make the reader wary not only of the products but also of the methods by which the products were being sold.

More than Rorty or Brindze, Morell was interested in the cultural effects of radio. This became especially evident in a chapter called “Peddling Human Misery for Profit.” In this chapter Morell attacked the radio program *Good Will Court*—a show in which downtrodden individuals told their sob stories to fatherly host A. L. Alexander and an anonymous “judge.” In the opening minutes host Alexander explained that the show was meant to instruct listeners in how to avoid misfortune:

One of the sad conditions of life is that experience is not transmissible. No man will learn from the misfortunes of another. . . . It is true,

nevertheless, that much of the satisfaction realized in presenting this hour lies in the fact that if there exists even one person on the brink of doing something which he would have had good reason to regret, to avoid a danger because of some situation here. (Morell 212–13)

Morell then offered the transcripts of three *Good Will Court* cases. In case 10755 a woman who returned a handbag full of jewels complained that she was given the paltry reward of \$5. Host Alexander and the judge concluded there was nothing she could do to force a larger reward. In case 10772 a man complained that his sister owed him money because he had taken care of her baby for seven months during the hours she was at work. The *Good Will Court* counseled the man to sue his sister for the money she owed him. In case 10775 a woman complained that her unemployed adult son had become a burden on her. The son complained that his mother had given him an inferiority complex. The judge scolded them both, and in the end they kissed and made up.

These transcripts provide a rare glimpse into a radio program that has been long forgotten. They also serve as convincing evidence for Morell's argument that radio advertising was exploitative. He pointed out that Chase & Sanborn Coffee—the show's sponsor—was the real victor in *Good Will Court*. The show's announcer claimed that "with every pound of Chase & Sanborn Coffee that you buy you help the great work of this Court." However, as Morell pointed out, the problems of the "poor, neurotic and overworked woman and her unemployed son" were not really solved by the *Good Will Court*. The "sufferer was left with his troubles," Morell argued, while "human misery" created a profit for the radio network and Chase & Sanborn Coffee.

What was to be done? Morell, like Rorty and Brindze, offered a last chapter of solutions. He urged legislation requiring that medicine labels distinguish between pain relievers and actual cures (253). He also recommended the Canadian method of drug regulation, which prohibited "any advertisement" of medicines designed to treat serious ailments—such as cancer or diabetes (254). Morell also pointed out that such legislative efforts would be wasted unless the government made greater efforts to enforce food and drug laws. Morell urged the government to make industries bear the cost of food and drug regulation. Finally, however, Morell urged the activation of a "consumer front" to "mobilize popular support for adequate consumer protection" (256).

In the end Morell offered a coherent vision for a consumer movement that would be made up of organized labor and consumers activists. He argued that "organized labor can and should play a dominant role in the fight for real protection for consumers." He pointed out that the consumer and the worker were, in fact, the same person:

It is often forgotten by the small minority of organized consumers as well as by organized labor that the trade unions are today the largest

and most effective association of consumers. . . . Closer cooperation between the workers who have recognized their plight as consumers, and between consumers who have recognized their existence as workers, will prove to be the most effective means of getting results.

Morell argued that in order for this coalition to take place, the “young clerk” in an insurance office and the “division manager” in a department store needed to see that “their problems of wages, working hours, and adjustment of grievances” were not that different from those of “linotype operator[s]” or “automobile worker[s].” Workers were consumers and consumers were workers, Morell argued, and they needed to recognize their commonalities in order to mobilize for change (259).

This conclusion reflected the respect for workers Morell had also demonstrated in his play *Turpentine*. As a dramatist, Morell was interested in the reform of radio not only because he feared its political and economic power: he also wanted the opportunity to produce culture with a leftist bent for radio. As Morell indicated by describing his failed attempt to have a play about Harlem actors be produced for CBS, Morell was a cultural producer who wanted a less commercial fate for the powerful dramatic medium of radio.

Poisons, Potions and Profits was well received by publications sympathetic to the consumer movement. Reviewers acknowledged the role that Consumers Union played in Morell’s book, and praised him for bringing the problems of radio reform and the consumer movement into one volume:

“A little alcohol, a little water, some coloring matter, a large advertising campaign, and you have it—a new, miraculous remedy.” This is the thesis of *Poisons, Potions, and Profits*, a study of radio advertising which Mr. Morell has based on reports from Consumers Union. Consumer movements are not new to this country. . . . Among them is Consumers Union, which, though it has nothing to sell, devotes itself to advice on what to buy and what not to buy.

Forum went on to praise Morell for refusing to seem “suicidal” in his presentation of depressing facts. Rather, *Forum* explained, Morell offered a “hopeful, persuasive plan for making this country a safe place to shop in.”¹⁵

Ruth Brindze, when she had an opportunity to review Morell’s book for *The Nation*, was not as kind. She complained that *Poisons, Potions and Profits* was an unoriginal contribution to the literature of the consumer movement:

Unfortunately, the products Mr. Morell names are also advertised in our best newspapers and magazines, and therefore have been exposed by almost every other guinea-pig writer. Mr. Morell brings some of this material up to date by drawing freely from the records of the Consumers Union, but practically he has added little to what has been

said before. The subtitle of his book, "The Anti-dote to Radio Advertising" seems over optimistic. More than a new food-and-drug law is needed if the radio is really to be operated in the public interest. (Brindze, "Consumer's" 694)

While Brindze was right—Morell did present information that had been offered by previous writers—she missed his larger point altogether: that radio advertising was different from other forms of advertising and more dangerous, in part because it offered so much less information. She also missed the fact that Morell called for much more than new food-and-drug laws: Morell wanted to see a full-scale, organized, cross-class consumer movement powerful enough to change drug laws as well as the commercial structure of radio.

Morell's book also drew the ire of the anti-consumer-movement "movement." While the Depression era saw the publication of a great deal of alarmist literature about the consumer movement, perhaps none was so hyperbolic as the pamphlet *Who's a Guinea Pig*, produced by the American Druggist Association in 1938. This pamphlet called the consumer education movement the "trojan horse" of modern-day advertising—a force that would destroy advertising (and by extension the drug industry) from within. The pamphlet claimed that consumerist "debunking literature" threatened the respectability of "nationally advertised products," which provided "the foundation of modern American business." These debunking books were dangerous, according to the pamphlet, because they "shook" the faith of consumers, including their "*FAITH* in products, *FAITH* in methods," and "*FAITH* in manufacturer's honor." Among the worst of this debunking literature, according to *Who's a Guinea Pig*, was Morell's *Poisons, Potions and Profits*.

Did Morell become the victim of a right-wing backlash? After writing *Poisons, Potions and Profits*, Morell had a hard time finding work as an author or a playwright. A fire in his Manhattan apartment destroyed all of his manuscripts in 1948, and Morell's wife, Margaret Horgan, destroyed all remaining documents in the 1950s, when the FBI began to investigate Morell's left-wing activities. Their only child, Valdi Morell, remembers that her father was blacklisted for writing *Poisons, Potions and Profits*. McCarthyism, she claims, helped to ruin her father's career.

Peter Morell and Margaret Horgan were very secretive about their lives before World War II. Horgan, from a wealthy family that settled in Butte, Montana, came east to New York to be educated and to work as a model in the 1920s. In Greenwich Village she met Peter Morell, a man with a mysterious past and excellent taste in clothes. Morell, who was born Peter Mindell, was Jewish—he was born in England, where his family lived after emigrating from Russia, but before coming to America. Morell was Peter's great-grandmother's maiden name and his pen name, which he made into his legal name in 1948 when Valdi

was born. His daughter speculates that it was partly because of religious prejudice that he changed his name to Morell.

Valdi recalls that “by the time I came along life had already dealt them quite a blow.” But she also remembers her parents’ luxurious apartment near Washington Square: it had fourteen rooms and parquet floors inlaid with games such as shuffleboard and hopscotch. In this apartment her parent’s had lively cocktail parties attended by artists, playwrights, intellectuals, and actors. Gradually, however, the family’s fortune was spent. Her father dealt in antiques for a few years, and later the family moved to a farm in Amagansett, Long Island. Her mother worked as a secretary for the Diebold Corporation. Finally, after years of Morell’s drinking and unemployment, the family lost their farm on Long Island. In 1963, after years of alcohol abuse and bankruptcy, Peter Morell died, a forgotten man, at the age of sixty-eight.¹⁶

Nonetheless, Morell left behind an important legacy. *Turpentine and Poisons, Potions and Profits* provide us with valuable evidence about the relationship between cultural producers and the consumer activists. In order to make radio more accessible to creative and progressive artists Morell transformed himself from an equal-rights playwright into a consumer advocate. In doing so he began to imagine a consumer movement that could bring industrial and white-collar workers into a radical alliance.

Conclusion

The writings of Rorty, Brindze, and Morell did not produce the radio reforms they hoped for. Nonetheless, their writings should not be read as the death knell of a fading reform movement. The movement to decommercialize radio continued beyond the postwar era: the FCC attacked commercial radio in 1946 with a publication called the Blue Book, a report that condemned “advertising excesses,” such as “the number of commercials presented in a given hour; the piling up of commercials; the time between commercials; the middle commercial; and the intermixture of program and advertising” (Meyer, 203); new consumerist battles were launched over the addition of FM channels; Pacifica redefined radical radio for the postwar era; and civil rights activists effectively brought down the most powerful—and the most racist—television station in the South, WLBT, using consumerist tactics. And thus it is important to see the work of these 1930s radio rebels in historical perspective: every generation fights anew for democratization of the airwaves, sometimes fighting against commercialization, while other times using consumer power to demand that advertisers respond to audiences (Meyer; Land; Greene).

Critiquing radio, for Rorty, Brindze, and Morell, was also a transformative act. By writing their radio critiques, these authors matured as consumer activists. In Morell’s case, writing about radio made it possible for him to *become* a con-

sumer activist. And finally, the lives of Rorty, Brindze, and Morell offer evidence for Colston Warne's thesis that advertising was responsible for the birth and the growth of the consumer movement. While marketers sought to "activate" consumers to buy, their tactics sometimes backfired: sometimes they created consumer activists. The radio advertising industry of the 1930s helped to spark a movement of intellectuals, journalists, and cultural producers who sought, in turn, to change the economic structure of the medium. And although their efforts failed, the consumer movement persisted.

These radio rebels believed that change was possible. While they did not always see in their lifetimes the changes they fought for, their writings and life stories remain an inspiration. As the African-American character Sue says at the victorious conclusion of *Turpentine*, we have to "keep fightin an' organizin'" if we are going to "keep livin'." Powerful words from a forgotten playwright—and a powerful lesson from an overlooked movement that had its origin in the 1930s and survives among us still.

Notes

1. Hutchinson 763; Bates: 324; "Summ. of *Our Master's Voice*, 807.
2. Pope says of Rorty's ecological criticism: "An ecological perspective could offer a perspective on American culture from the outside, as it were. It claimed to evaluate social structures and practices by standards higher than those of the particular society"(14).
3. Ruth Brindze, "Biographical Sketch," Columbia University Archives, Vanguard Press Collection, Box 22, "Ruth Brindze, Trade Winds."
4. Jim Henle, "Biographical Sketch of Ruth Brindze," Columbia University Archives, Vanguard Press Collection, Box 23, "Ruth Brindze, Publicity, '42-50."
5. "The Nation" iv.
6. Ruth Brindze, consumer column, *The Nation* 6 Nov. 1935: 541, 29 Jan. 1936: TK, 18 Mar. 1936: 347, 20 Feb. 1937: 208, 17 Apr. 1937: 430-31, 24 July 1937: 98-99, 4 Dec. 1937: 612-13, 5 Feb. 1938: 154-55.
7. Ruth Brindze, "Getting Your Money's Worth: A Monthly Department of Consumer Education for High School Students," column *Scholastic* 9 Oct. 1939: 20-S, 13 Nov. 1939: 18-S, 18 Dec. 1939: 16-S, 15 Jan. 1940: 20-S, 19 Feb. 1940: 34, 15 Apr. 1940: 34, 39, 13 May 1940: 40, 43.
8. Rev. of *Johnny Get Your Money's Worth*, 43.
9. Letter from Evelyn Shrift to Ruth Brindze, Columbia University Archives, Vanguard Press Collection, Box 23, "Ruth Brindze, 1953."
10. *The Gulf Stream* won first prize in the *New York Herald Tribune* Book Festival and was also a Junior Literary Guild selection. Some of Brindze's subsequent children's books included *Boating Is Fun* (1949), *The Story of the Totem Pole* (1951), *The Story of Gold* (1955), *All about Undersea Exploration* (1960), and *Investing Money: The Facts about Stocks and Bonds* (1968). Wald. 483.
11. Dr. Eugenie Fribourg, personal communication, 9 July 2000. Ruth Brindze's sister-in-law, Eugenie Fribourg, was Albert Fribourg's sister. Today she is in her nineties and is still a practicing medical doctor. As for Ruth's nickname, "Jim," Brindze signed much of her publishing correspondence, "Jim," which makes her correspondence records very confusing, since one of her most frequent editors was Jim Henle.
12. Dr. Eugenie Fribourg, personal communication, 9 July 2000; Dr. Anne Fribourg, personal communication, 28 June 2000. Dr. Anne Fribourg is the daughter of Eugenie Fribourg and the niece of Ruth Brindze.

13. L.N., "The Play: Pine Forest," *New York Times* 27 June 1936: 21.
14. Morell is wrongly included in a volume listing black American playwrights (Arata 158).
15. Rev. of *Poisons, Potions, Profits* iv.
16. Valdi Morell, personal communication, 8 July 2000.

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CHAPTER 9**SCARY WOMEN AND SCARRED MEN*****Suspense, Gender Trouble, and Postwar Change, 1942–1950***

Allison McCracken

Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, [and] the pure can be known.

—Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and The Technology of Monsters*, 1995

IN 1941 THERE WERE SIXTEEN “thriller drama” programs on radio. By the end of the war there were forty-three. Thrillers were the fastest-growing radio genre during the war, and they dominated postwar radio; their popularity was rivaled only by radio’s top comedy-variety shows.¹ These programs and stars, almost entirely neglected by scholars, provide rich sources of cultural information.² Unlike most radio drama programs of the time, which featured adaptations of feature films, thrillers regularly relied on original scripts or adaptations of contemporary works that foregrounded issues of gender, sexuality, family, and consumption. Thrillers explored the pathology of the emasculated man, the stalked woman, the sadistic professional, the femme fatale, and the aggressive career woman in ways that were specific to radio and its domestic audience. While radio thrillers share similar themes and subject matter with 1940s film genres such as film noir and the “paranoid gothic,” radio privileged situations of particular relevance to radio’s largely female audience: stories of thwarted career ambition, the life-threatening dangers of unhappy marriages, and the isolation and narrowness of suburban life.

This essay seeks to begin to restore these complex texts to history by focusing specifically on the social and industrial significance of the most famous of these programs, entitled *Suspense*. *Suspense* began as a prestige program for CBC in 1942 and, along with *Inner Sanctum*, officially initiated the suspense era on radio and, later, television.⁴ *Suspense* was the first of these programs to achieve wide recognition for its ability to tap into its audience's fears and, in doing so, established conventions for the radio genre that soon became commonplace. The effectiveness of *Suspense*, I argue, is due not only to the social relevance of its subject matter for its audience but also to its producers' ability to exploit the horror of radio's disembodied voices through its gender-transgressive characters and stars.

As film scholars and radio historians have shown, the disembodied voice has long had the potential to discomfit listeners because it foregrounds the unnatural separation of the voice from the body (Silverman; Hilmes). Radio producers worked hard in the 1920s and 1930s to naturalize radio's voices through publicity that sought to embody stars in photos and personal stories. Regular programming and live broadcasting were also crucial in making audiences feel comfortable with the new medium. Radio's stars created friendly personas that became familiar to listeners through regular daily or weekly appearances in their homes; live broadcasting united the mass audience as never before and put them on the same time schedule. This sense of order and unity mitigated the technological newness of a medium in which the body was invisible and uncertain.

Suspense undermined this comfort zone by resurrecting and exploiting the horror of the disembodied voice. Unlike most radio fictions, which maintained a continuing, familiar cast of characters, *Suspense's* stars and characters changed from week to week. *Suspense* connected its voices to unfamiliar bodies, deviant bodies, bodies marked by trauma and perversion. The horror of these voices was made even more intense by the feeling of having the horrific voice "in one's head" through the use of first-person narration, which encouraged listeners to identify with either the psychotic murderer or his/her intended victim. Furthermore, many of the voices on the show were recognizable, belonging to Hollywood actors who often portrayed socially deviant characters (especially those who conveyed gender deviance or sexual perversion), including Agnes Moorehead, Eve Arden, Lucille Ball, Ida Lupino, Peter Lorre, Joseph Cotton, and Vincent Price. *Suspense* provided opportunities for these Hollywood actors, usually supporting players, in films to take center stage as complex, subjective protagonists in their own twisted narratives.

In a postwar world pervaded by hysteria over proper social roles (May; Ehrenreich; Corber), *Suspense* voices effectively represented the seductive and horrific power of the "other." In her study of gothic narratives, Judith Halberstam notes that one characteristic of the genre is that it "inspires both

fear and desire at the same time—fear of and desire for the other, fear of and desire for the possibility of latent perversity lurking within the reader herself” (13). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls this “the aesthetic of pleasurable fear” (qtd. in Halberstam vi), an apt description of radio thrillers such as *Suspense*, which promised its listeners “thrills and chills” (Grams 34). While *Suspense*’s perverse stars, stories, and voices served as cautionary tales and instructive examples of such deviance for postwar audiences, they also provided opportunities for listeners to identify and even empathize with deviant characters and their frustrations regarding the narrowing boundaries of the postwar world. Thus while radio suspense participated in the dominant national culture by continually identifying the deviant through its radio voices, these programs also continually denaturalized the norm by foregrounding, promoting, and publicizing these stars and the frustrated characters to whom they gave voice.

***Suspense*: Industry and Genre**

“Remember those discussions we used to have about murders?”

“Better than bridge, anytime.”

—Exchange from “The Burning Court,” *Suspense*, 17 June 1942

Suspense was one of a number of thrillers that began on radio during the early years of the war. According to *Suspense* historian Martin Grams Jr., radio producers were looking for ways to keep “already worried listeners on the edge of their chairs” (Grams 5), and started developing programs that blended mystery and detective elements with those of horror and psychological realism. Until that time, “thriller drama” had been a blanket term that had encompassed adventure programs such as *Buck Rogers*, crime programs such as *Gangbusters*, and detective programs such as *True Detective Mystery*. The years 1940–1942 saw a great increase in the latter two kinds of programs, reflecting the popularity of the mystery, detective, and crime pulp fiction of writers such as Agatha Christie, Dashiell Hammett, and Mickey Spillane. The turn toward horror represented an important change in direction for the genre and for radio more generally. (While radio’s potential to scare listeners had been evident since Orson Welles caused a stir with his “War of the Worlds” broadcast in 1938, it had since then rarely been exploited.⁵ But the success of NBC’s campy horror show *Inner Sanctum* in 1941 proved that the subgenre had legs, and CBS and producer William Spier sought to capitalize on its success by creating *Suspense* in June 1942.)

Suspense’s originality lay not only in its generic newness but in its promotion as a prestige thriller program. The radio and film industries did not consider the pulp genres from which *Suspense* derived to be “high culture”; many studios would not allow their major film stars to appear on such programs because they feared damage to the stars’ reputations (Grams 45). Yet from the beginning

Suspense creators sought to legitimize *Suspense* as a high-class production by publicizing the talent of its creative team and the high quality of its scripts, as well as working hard to attract first-rate stars. Producer-director William Spier fine-tuned each episode, coordinating music, actors, and sound to maximum effect. Bernard Herrmann (famous for his later work with Hitchcock) composed and conducted music for the series.⁶ Most significantly for radio's audience, Orson Welles endorsed the program, lending it his cultural authority by starring in one of its first and most famous productions, an original ghost story for radio by Lucille Fletcher called "The Hitch-Hiker." The program's prestige gave cultural weight to its often gory subject matter, protecting the producers from criticisms of immorality or cheap thrills (and therefore network censorship).⁷ Such a designation also helped shield the program from charges of belonging to a "women's genre," even as it came increasingly to incorporate elements from "feminine" genres such as the soap opera and the gothic.

The majority of radio's listeners had always been assumed by advertisers to be women, although the gendered bifurcation of the radio day in the mid-1930s (daytime: feminized and lowbrow vs. nighttime: masculinized and highbrow) functioned to deemphasize this situation and therefore help the industry establish some needed cultural legitimacy (Hilmes 154). The industry continued to promote this gendered construction during the war years, even when social conditions obviously did not support it. The male audience decreased overall, as did the audience for daytime programming generally because women were involved in war work. While the film industry responded to these changes in the early 1940s by making more movies aimed explicitly at a female audience, the radio industry continued to promote nighttime programming as more highbrow (and therefore masculine) even as its content changed in ways that appealed to women audiences. This is most obvious in a genre such as the thriller, long considered to appeal primarily to men and boys. As thriller programs developed in the early 1940s, they began to take on aspects of the culturally devalued daytime serials, and *Suspense* best exemplifies these developments. Increasingly, *Suspense* programs came to be set within the home, to feature female leads and employ female narration and to emphasize psychological complexity and character development over plot and action, all characteristics associated more with daytime drama (Hilmes 160–61). In addition, *Suspense* programs, like soap operas, came increasingly to rely on original scripts that addressed and dramatized current social problems in realistic ways. By the late 1940s the program's emphasis on psychological realism had become so ingrained that the producers of *Suspense* measured its success by those standards. Elliot Lewis, who acted in and produced *Suspense*, commented:

As a rule we don't go in for supernatural stories. Our theory is that a story packs a lot more wallop if it remains believable throughout.

Most suspense dramas concentrate on a few characters and a single suspenseful situation. We don't like complicated who-dunits, whereas we do like some emphasis on mood and characterization. (Grams 98)

Such elements are also characteristic of another "women's" genre, the gothic, which was perhaps the greatest influence on *Suspense* programs of the 1940s. While, as Judith Halberstam has noted, "there are many congruities between gothic fiction and detective fiction," in the gothic "crime is embodied within a specifically deviant form—the monster—that announces itself (de-monstrates) as the place of corruption" (2). Gothic novels, which were largely written by women and aimed at a female audience, most often conflated the monster with the seducer/husband (*Dracula*) or a secret rival (*Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*). Gothics are characterized by "woman plus habitation" (qtd. in Doane 124). They often take place in a house or castle and center around a secret that the heroine must investigate and expose. Film theorist Mary Ann Doane has identified a series of films in the 1940s as "paranoid gothics," which she sees as a subgenre of the woman's film. Like many *Suspense* programs of the 1940s, these films focus on the stalked woman who believes her husband is planning to murder her; as Doane notes, they are characterized by the "conjunction of sex and murder, the conflation of the verbs 'to murder' and 'to kill'" (123). The home becomes a place of terror for the woman, who cannot trust her husband. Paranoid gothic films—like *Suspense* radio programs—differ from most gothic novels in that the man really is trying to kill the woman (Cowie 137).⁸

Where *Suspense* programs differ from gothic narratives is in offering a subjective view of the monster. The killer/husband is often the central character in *Suspense*, giving it much in common with another film genre that foregrounds the obsessed or traumatized man, the film noir. In film noir, the mystery elements of the detective film are displaced by suspense and horror elements that privilege the tortured psyche of the protagonist, for whom right/wrong is muddied by his involvement in the situation (Krutnik 39). The protagonist is characterized by feelings of powerlessness and a lack of control, as well as by internal psychological struggles, which are heightened through the use of flashbacks and voice-over narration and are often symbolized through fantasy or the presence of the mysterious femme fatale whom the protagonist must try to decode (Krutnik 47).

Elizabeth Cowie has suggested that the differences between the film noir, the paranoid gothic, and the melodrama or "woman's film" of the 1940s are pretty minimal and that the only difference used to categorize them in film history seems to be the sex of the protagonist (Cowie 134). And indeed, radio thrillers do not make these gender distinctions; rather, the radio versions borrow elements from all three of these genres. These influences combine most

noticeably and effectively in the *Suspense* program that becomes the model for the series and the radio genre: "Sorry, Wrong Number."

"I Could Hear Them but They Couldn't Hear Me"

—Agnes Moorehead, "Sorry, Wrong Number, 25 May 1943

For the first year of its run, from June 1942 until May 1943, *Suspense* featured more recognizably "boy" genre characteristics; mystery, detective, and ghost stories predominated. The content of the program was heavily influenced by its chief writer, John Dickson Carr, a British novelist and radio playwright who specialized in mystery stories (Grams 15). Carr wrote or adapted twenty-five episodes during *Suspense's* first year, many of them scripts he had previously produced for the BBC. His characters and settings were English, which doubtless helped establish the cultured tone of the series but did little to distinguish the program from other such fare on the air in terms of content. Carr left *Suspense* in June 1943 after a dispute with the network, leaving the program without a regular writer. By then, however, the tremendous popularity of "Sorry, Wrong Number" had signaled a new direction for the series.

"Sorry, Wrong Number," written by *Suspense* contributing writer Lucille Fletcher (Bernard Herrmann's wife) and starring Agnes Moorehead, was a watershed moment in the history of radio drama and eventually became the most famous original radio drama of all time. (It was a contemporary update of the gothic, the story of a woman in danger in her home who must discover a secret before it is too late. Moorehead plays a bedridden invalid who overhears a conversation on the telephone between two men who are planning to murder a woman in half an hour. Moorehead's character, whom we know only as Mrs. Albert Stevenson, tries desperately to prevent the murder by calling on various public institutions for help—the police, the phone company, the hospital—but they do nothing for her, and her frustration increasingly borders on hysteria. In the last few moments she realizes that it is she herself who is the intended victim, that her husband has paid to have *her* killed. She calls the police, but she is too late, and the play ends with her desperate screams as she is being stabbed to death.)

The play touched a nerve. Distracted drivers ran off the road, and many worried listeners tried to contact police stations to warn them about the impending murder. CBS was flooded with calls commending the program's realism and Moorehead's performance. The show was repeated three weeks later and then eight times within the next few years, always starring Moorehead. The program and the public's intense reaction were widely covered in the popular press, the most attention given a single radio broadcast since Welles's "War of the Worlds." Its success proved the popularity of this type of thriller on radio, encouraged the proliferation of such programs, and redefined the *Suspense* series. Detective and mystery plots disappeared as the producers turned to writers who specialized in

psychological horror, such as Fletcher and novelist Cornell Woolrich (the writer whose work was adapted most often for *Suspense*).⁹ Programs began to feature more female leads, narrators, and points of view and to focus on domestic tensions in the genre as whole, in particular making—the stalked wife and the killer/husband staples of *Suspense* programs for the next several years.

Equally significant, “Sorry, Wrong Number” let loose Agnes Moorehead’s voice upon the world, validating not only the power of the disembodied voice to produce horror in the listener but the power of the deviant star to command it. In gothic terms, Moorehead is the victim in “Sorry, Wrong Number,” but she is also the monster. Her voice is monstrous because it represents the nightmare of the disembodied woman’s voice, which, as Kaja Silverman and others have demonstrated, is much more culturally disturbing than a man’s voice. In her examination of voice and gender in the classical Hollywood cinema, Silverman notes how women’s voices are generally treated differently from men’s. Even as narrators, women’s voices must at some point be attached to a body, must emphasize the woman’s function as visual fetish. Men’s voices, however, are not similarly fixed within the diegesis (39). Instead, men’s voices are “often associated with the cinematic apparatus,” and can represent transcendental masculinity through their “voice of god” narration (45).

Because radio is invisible, the voice cannot be visually fixed to a gendered body, and therefore the detached woman’s voice is much more potentially disturbing. Early radio producers struggled with this problem. As radio historian Michele Hilmes has shown, women’s voices were deemed unsuitable for many kinds of broadcasting because of the discomfort associated with the disembodied woman’s voice. Women could not represent the “neutral” network as a news announcer, for example, because their voices, in the words of one station manager, were too “highly individual” and had “too much personality” (Hilmes 143). Radio producers relegated most women’s voices to daytime programming or roles as comic sidekicks in prime time. “Sorry, Wrong Number,” however, represented the first time that a female voice had so dominated an evening dramatic broadcast. While women had starred in dramatic programs (most notably *Lux Radio Theatre*), they had been surrounded by supporting players (and commercial interruptions). In contrast, “Sorry, Wrong Number” was largely a one-woman show originally broadcast without commercial interruption. The only supporting players were those unnamed and often interchangeable voices heard over the telephone; they were dehumanized in order to emphasize Moorehead’s isolation and the bureaucratic and criminal forces allied against her. Only Moorehead’s voice was consistently present and recognizable, and the horror of it was accentuated by the fact that Moorehead’s persona was decidedly unfeminine.

At the time she starred in “Sorry, Wrong Number,” Agnes Moorehead was best known for her work with Orson Welles. She was one of his Mercury Theatre radio players and had starred on film for him as Citizen Kane’s unmotherly mom

and George Amberson's hysterical aunt. As scholar Patricia White has noted, Moorehead's negativity is key to her persona (White, *Uninvited* 185). She most often portrayed mean or hysterical women marked by their lack of femininity. In "Sorry, Wrong Number" Moorehead was able to express and sustain a range of negative feeling unusual for a radio actress up to that time and certainly beyond the bounds of normative feminine behavior: rage, bitterness, sarcasm, jealousy, and annoyance. For thirty minutes Moorehead's "crackling, snapping, sinister, paranoiac, paralyzing voice" (as one critic called it) widened the boundaries of both gender and sound on radio (White, *Out in Culture* 111). In recordings of the program, Moorehead's vocal expression already begins at the outer edges of everyday speech, and she pushes her voice further still, whispering her fear or opposition under her breath, commenting sarcastically in low tones, screaming as she is being murdered. Agnes Moorehead's voice brought back to radio in an overt way the excess, the horror, and the strangeness of the woman's disembodiment. Her monstrosity is confirmed in the show's closing moments, when she is killed. "Sorry, Wrong Number" is one of the few *Suspense* programs in which the murderer goes unpunished—the implication being, of course, that the murderer killed the real monster when he silenced Moorehead's voice.

While the end of "Sorry, Wrong Number" suggests that the deviant character should be silenced, the character's centrality in the narrative and Moorehead's forceful portrayal requires a much more complex reading of the program. Although "Sorry, Wrong Number" ultimately suggests, quite explicitly in Moorehead's gruesome murder, that the nagging woman/wife must be killed, audiences are also encouraged to perceive events from Moorehead's point of view. The killers could not hear Mrs. Stevenson, the police would not listen to her, but the audience is forced to do so and therefore can understand her frustration. Her character suggests that women still ultimately have no control over their fate, that their cries for help are ignored by those in power, and that they are not safe even in their homes. The domestic ideal can also be a nightmare in which husbands are either powerless to protect women or are actively working to seal their doom.

The text's (and, indeed, the genre's) potential for social critique is also reinforced by Moorehead's position as the program's star and the increase in her star power as a result of her performance. While she had been well known as a supporting player in Hollywood, *Suspense* made Moorehead the star of the show. This shift is significant. As Patricia White has persuasively argued, the supporting character is meant to "support" heterosexual Hollywood by operating as a site for "the encoding of the threat and the promise of female deviance." The supporting character or sidekick could be "sarcastic, unromantic, and sensible" because in doing so she buttressed the normative heterosexuality of the heroine (White, *Out in Culture* 93–95). But what happens when deviance is made central? As the sarcastic, hysterical, whiny lead character, Moorehead is unrelentingly



Agnes Moorehead in a rare moment of calm before the microphone during the 1948 broadcast of "Sorry, Wrong Number."

present in a way she could never be on film because there is no normative figure with which to contrast her. *Suspense* thus gives the usual "supporting character" a subjectivity she never gets on film, making her radio voice even more potentially disturbing because it ups her subversive potential. Moorehead's role on "Sorry, Wrong Number" became emblematic of the way in which actors best known for playing gender deviants in supporting roles in films became the stars of radio thrillers, a practice that continued throughout the 1940s.¹⁰

Moorehead's stardom also served to undercut her character's monstrousness and the unsettling nature of her voice. She was widely praised for her performance on *Suspense* and became the program's most famous and popular star. The press reveled in her vocal pyrotechnics, validating the program's highbrow aspira-

tions by praising Moorehead's technique in masculinist terms: "She can control her voice like a sound engineer," noted *Time* approvingly. She was largely given credit for the program's success ("Right Number, Agnes," applauded *Newsweek*), and articles appeared for years afterward detailing her performance, what *Time* called "a grueling experience for both actress and listeners."¹¹ If such rhetoric served to protect the program from criticism for broadcasting disturbing material into American homes, it also protected the program's stars from being perceived as deviants by emphasizing their "technical" skills. In truth, however, Moorehead became a star because of her ability to portray deviance so convincingly, thus ultimately undercutting the finality of the deviant's ultimate punishment at the end of the play: the deviant character is punished, but the deviant star lived on.

Suspense and Society

Nonmarital behavior in all its forms became a national obsession after the war . . . Individuals who chose personal paths that did not include marriage and parenthood risked being perceived as perverted, immoral, unpatriotic, and pathological. Neighbors shunned them as if they were dangerous; the government investigated them as security risks.

—Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era, 1988*

What do you want? An art director or a Sunday school teacher?

—Anne Baxter to her boss when he comments on her aggressiveness, "Always Room at the Top," *Suspense 20 February 1947*

Part of the reason that "Sorry, Wrong Number" was so successful and resonated so strongly is that it dealt with anxieties about women's social roles during the 1940s. While women had greater access to the public realm during the war (symbolized in "Sorry, Wrong Number" by the telephone), such access does not ultimately give the heroine of "Sorry, Wrong Number" any ability to affect the larger machinations of society (symbolized by the murder plot) or even to determine her own fate (she is killed). The play's popularity suggests women's recognition of the tentative nature of their gains during the war and their fear of losing them to domestic confinement after the war's end.¹² For men, the domestic life seems ~~little better~~; while the program offers Moorehead's husband the power to remove himself from an unpleasant domestic situation, he can do so only through murder. Otherwise, the program suggests, he has to remain tied to a dependent, undesirable partner.

The fact that this particular situation struck such a nerve with the public, enough to make domestic tensions the dominant theme in *Suspense* through the rest of the 1940s, suggests both the relevance of this subject for the audience

and the way in which gender roles served as repositories of postwar ideology. Scholars such as Elaine Tyler May and Barbara Ehrenreich have written extensively about the changes in social roles during the wartime and postwar periods. The war gave women greater opportunities for work and economic independence than they had ever had previously. During the war years, the female labor force increased by 6.5 million (or 57%); three-fourths of these new workers were married women. By 1945 there were almost 20 million women workers in the United States (Krutnik 57; May 69). But there was a deep cultural ambivalence about this situation. While wartime policies encouraged women to take jobs “for the duration,” the domestic ideal unattainable in the 1930s because of the Depression was still promoted as the ultimate postwar goal for women.

Indeed, while the patriotic woman doing a temporary job was okay, the career woman was not. Government propaganda, psychiatric discourses, and the media suggested that women who did not want to leave the work world to occupy their proper roles within the family were a threat to society generally. As May notes, “the independence of wartime women gave rise to fears of female sexuality as a dangerous force on the loose” (69). Women were fired from their jobs, education for women was publicized as dangerous, and women were encouraged to view marriage, parenting, and purchasing as their new civic duties. (Salaries for women dropped 26% as working women were forced to return to low-paying, “female” jobs meant to ensure their further dependence on men) (May 76).

At the same time, returning veterans were encouraged to accept their prescribed role as family breadwinners, settle down into middle management jobs, get married, and maintain an ideal suburban existence. Women were supposed to help returning vets with their psychological and physical traumas from the war, making it easier for them to accept their status as corporate lackeys by treating them as heads of the house. Men and women who did not perform these roles were seen as deviant, immature, homosexual, psychotic.

This historical context is central to an analysis of postwar radio thriller programs. Most of the scholarly work on thrillers in the 1940s, focusing as it does on film noir, has relied heavily on psychoanalysis as an interpretive tool. There are good reasons for this: the pervasiveness of psychoanalytic dreams and symbols within the text, the primacy of the visual fetish (particularly that of the femme fatale), the use of subjective narrative techniques such as voice-over and flashback, and the popularization of Freudian psychology within the culture as a means to explain gender behavior. While psychoanalysis—particularly in these last two respects—is a significant influence on *Suspense's* texts as well, it operates differently on radio than in film. In radio suspense texts, the absence of the visual shorthand of film noir—“Freudian” symbols, fetishes, expressionist lighting, “mysterious” femme fatales—requires that more emphasis be put on social and psychological realism. First-person narration, for example, is much

more detailed on radio in terms of the character's social context and motivation. Since a character's thoughts cannot be implied from his or her facial expression, radio narration must serve to ground the character in a social reality, frequently rooting his or her behavior in some specific psychological or social problem.

These differences in medium are particularly obvious and significant in the depiction of female characters in *Suspense* vs. film noir. Noirs generally privilege the point of view of the traumatized male character who is threatened by the independent and aggressive woman, the femme fatale. She is most notable by her function as spectacle and by the fetishization of her body. Any possibility of the femme fatale's subjectivity is always compromised and undercut in noir by this fetishization. Frank Krutnick notes, "Many noirs feature pivotal sequences in which an ambitious and independent woman is explicitly represented as erotic spectacle," which serves to "deny the woman a subjective centering within the text" (62). For this reason, film noir has generally been considered to be a male genre; men have language, while women serve primarily as erotic spectacle.¹³ In radio, however, the woman's persona cannot be defined primarily by her body. Narratives in which women appear, therefore, have to be organized differently, in ways that usually include a greater access to language (and other modes of communication) than film femme fatales. While the woman's body remains unknowable and potentially frightening, it is possible for the listener to understand her point of view more easily because her body is no longer the spectacular distraction it is in film noir. Instead, we listen to what she is saying, rather than how she looks, and her social circumstances are made clearer. *Suspense* women have reasons for doing what they do; they cannot simply symbolize social disorder. Because of this, the femme fatale's subjectivity is not only much more apparent and more available to the audience but integral to listeners' understanding of the story and its emotional impact.

Women were also a much stronger presence in radio thrillers than in their film counterparts. Female characters usually had costarring parts and equal airtime with male characters; between a fourth and a third of *Suspense* plays produced during this period starred women on their own, and many of these featured female narrators. A good example of how radio suspense changes the emphasis of a femme fatale story is the *Suspense* drama "A Little Piece of Rope" (14 Oct. 1948), starring Lucille Ball. Ball plays a "baby-faced" girl killer who pretends to be a schoolgirl to pick up men to rob and blackmail. She narrates her story, encouraging the listener to empathize with her situation. She can't get a job because she looks too "young and pretty" (which could easily be read as a comment on the loss of job opportunities for women after the war), so she exploits the men who want to exploit her:

I have uniforms for all the best schools, and I still have the baby face. . . . When school's out I let some old gent pick me up. They

always want to park up in the hills or some other lonely place. I drop my compact; he bends over to pick it up and I let him have it with a special little blackjack I carry. Then I leave, taking their money and any letters I find. You'd be surprised what kind of letters some of them do have. Makes a dandy bank balance now and then. Them—humph! Remember, I pick them old enough to have families, dignified jobs—would they want to admit to chasing bobby soxers? They never squawk—ha-ha!

In many ways, Ball's character has the markings of a classic noir femme fatale—she's beautiful and duplicitous, uses her sexual allure to get ahead, and takes advantage of unsuspecting men. But in shifting the focus of the story from the male to the female point of view, her motivations become understandable, if not justifiable, and listeners can even admire her bravery, cleverness, and wit. Indeed, it is quite a different thing for a film noir hero to be consumed by lust and greed than it is for a woman to choose robbery as her primary occupation. The woman is not socially privileged, as the man is; therefore her choices are more limited. Unlike noir then, in which the femme fatale's motivations are often kept mysterious, the female characters in *Suspense* are often presented as motivated by social need. And while Ball's character is ultimately killed by one of her intended victims, she is never portrayed as insane or mysterious. Furthermore, radio suspense generally did not cast femme fatale actresses in femme fatale roles. Radio's femme fatales were women known primarily not for their sexuality or bodies but for their strength or sassiness. Lucille Ball's personal magnetism and popularity were important factors in creating audience empathy for this home-wrecking character. Ball often played very savvy, wisecracking dames in her film and radio appearances. As well as being a frequent star of *Suspense*, she also had her own radio program, *My Favorite Husband*, and was popular with radio audiences.

Like the femme fatale's story, the dilemma of the career woman is also explored in terms of both social and psychological realism in *Suspense* (femme fatales were often conflated with career women in *Suspense* narratives). "The Well-Dressed Corpse" (18 Jan. 1951) stars Eve Arden as Ruth, a single, self-made career woman who falls in love with the correspondent she's been dating, only to discover that he's going to marry a young socialite. She's enraged at him for leading her on, and although the program sets her up as the too-masculine woman (her ex-lover calls her "guy" and "boss"), her own understanding of her situation is remarkably clear-eyed. She recognizes for the first time that society is not going to allow her the same rewards as men who are in similar positions of economic power: "So that's the way it was. I'd saved myself for the one man who had what I had—brains and guts and talent. And I suddenly found out I'd saved myself for what I couldn't have." This social double standard is particularly evident in the talk she has with her ex-lover about his new girlfriend:

Ruth: . . . You look a little too smug to suit my taste right now.

Roy: Ruthie, don't—don't do this to yourself—you're too good a guy.

Ruth: That's easy for you to say. I wish I was in your position and you were in mine. . . . How can you marry someone like her? You'll be bored to death in six weeks. . . . What's she ever done to deserve you? Gone to a few parties, made a trip to Europe every year, learned how to play six-hand canasta? Or maybe it's her figure Roy, if it's her figure, just remember somebody pounds it into shape every morning after those big nights, and if it weren't for several dozen foundation garments—

Roy: Oh, stop it Ruth!

Ruth: You've made a fool out of me for some grown up child who probably never did anything for herself.

For having such power (and making such incisive comments), Arden's character is made to pay and pay and pay. Her downfall is particularly humiliating, as everyone around her—her secretary, her boss, and the city gossip columnists—revels in her embarrassment, happy to see her humiliated. Meanwhile, her ex-lover patronizes her, telling her not to be upset. She's so angry with him for not seeing the differences in their positions ("I don't like being ripped open for the public to watch") that she pounds six bullets into him, thus sealing her own fate. As in the Lucille Ball program, Arden's pathology is the product of social circumstances that force women into difficult positions. Because her point of view is privileged throughout, and, again, because Eve Arden was a star whose persona was smart and strong, it's easy to see how listeners might empathize with her. Also, Arden was concurrently starring on radio in the hit comedy series *Our Miss Brooks*. As Miss Brooks, she represented the sharp, sensible single woman, always three steps ahead of her boss and her would-be boyfriend. In this way, Arden's program was one of the few postwar programs (later transferred to television) that suggested it was okay for a woman in the 1950s to be unmarried. Arden's persona and authority as a star added more weight to her character's arguments, even though Ruth ultimately served as a warning to women about the pitfalls of career ambition.

The competition for jobs between working women and returning veterans was also a frequent subject of *Suspense* narratives. Polls in 1945 revealed that three-fourths of employed women wanted to keep working after the war (May 76; Field). In "The Bullet" (29 Dec. 1949), Ida Lupino plays such a woman, one who must face her husband's return from prison (a veiled parallel to the returning vet) and his desire to take over the business she has run more successfully than he did. The program is remarkable for the way in which it sets up this problem from her point of view, making even her unfaithfulness to her husband a recuperable offense. Their conversation when she picks him up from prison

neatly establishes the way in which her desires are now in conflict with his espousal of more traditional marriage roles:

Ruth [narrating]: He looked at me so strangely all the way through the parking lot as we got to the car.

Harry: What did you do to yourself? You're so changed.

Ruth: For the better, I hope. . . . When I came out of the kitchen to take over the business, Harry, while you were away, I had to change out of my apron.

Harry: Had to dye your hair, too, had to become a real glamour girl, huh? And that dress—is that one of ours? How's business going, you hardly mentioned it in your letters—holding its own?

Ruth: Better than that. Just about tripled our volume since you went away.

[After a disagreement]

Harry: We've got nothing to fight about. I'm back in the business and you can go back to taking care of the house, cooking—

Ruth: No, no, I—

Harry:—keeping things looking nice, letting your hair go back to the color it used to be—

Ruth: I can't do it. . . . Look, I don't want to be the boss, but I can be of help to you.

Harry: Sure, have a nice hot dinner waiting for me when I come home from work.

Ruth: We can afford a cook for that now.

Harry: Cook? You're all the cook we need.

Ruth: Harry, I'm not the same anymore. I can't sit home and wait for you to come and tell me what the world's all about.

Harry: Then you're going to have to learn, baby. You're just going to have to learn. [Scary music, end of scene]

This conversation reproduces postwar rhetoric in which the threat of the wife's economic independence is symbolized by her sexual freedom. The program's logic suggests that Ruth never would have cheated on Harry if she had not had financial independence. Still, the narrative is complex. Ruth is clearly the better businessperson of the couple, and her arguments are sensible and well made. The suffering she goes through in the program because of her independent thinking, however, suggests that the forces aligned against her are too strong. She pays for her success as a female in the business world. In an effort to get her to turn over the business to him, her husband terrorizes her with a gun. The police refuse to protect her, telling her that clearly he's "in love with her, crazy about her, would never hurt her." While this program ends with a reconciliation between the couple, the resolution is strikingly ambiguous. She turns

the gun on him but finds she cannot shoot him; he realizes she loves him, and no longer threatens her. She bursts into tears and can't stop crying. Her tears suggest both relief that the terror is over and an acknowledgment that she is still trapped. When Harry tells her not to cry anymore, Ruth responds (in the narrative's final words), "Let me, Harry, let me cry," suggesting that she is more defeated than relieved. Thus while the wife begins the program as its confident narrator, by the end she has been deprived of her position of authority, both within the postwar world and within the narrative; she is deprived, finally, of the language with which to communicate her pain.

While Harry comes out on top by the end of this story, the narrative is that much more compelling because he too is a troubled character who is unsure of his place in postwar society and whose voice is marked by trauma. The emasculated man is the counterpart of the too-masculine career woman in these stories, usually an emotionally dependent husband or (less frequently) a frustrated corporate employee. As in film noir, these men are frequently identifiable as veterans, men who have traumatic pasts and have difficulty adjusting to "normal" life because of guilt or neuroses (Maltby 66; Krutnik 17; Place 66). They are sensitive, easily threatened, violent, and often plagued and/or paralyzed by psychic damage. Their paranoia and neuroses result in an unstable subjectivity, particularly in terms of gender roles. They frequently assume positions coded as feminine in the postwar world; they are overly emotional, dependent, and vulnerable (Doane 31). Harry in "The Bullet" is devastated at the thought of his wife's possible infidelity. In "The X-Ray Camera" (23 Oct. 1947), star Dennis O'Keefe plans to murder his wife for wanting to divorce him. His obsession with her is beyond his comprehension: "Loving her deeply and firmly and at the same time hating her—wishing she would die so I wouldn't depend on her for the affection I desire so desperately."

The emasculation of these men is reflected in the emotional extremes and lack of control in their voices. They frequently weep, plead, breathe rapidly in fear or panic, and raise their voices defensively if confronted. The husband in "Three O'Clock" (10 Mar. 1949) is an excellent example of this hysterical male voice. Paul (Van Heflin) has planted a bomb to kill his wife but ends up trapped alone with the bomb himself, awaiting his certain death at three o'clock. Throughout his ordeal, which is the bulk of the narrative, Paul is the opposite of the stoic soldier. He weeps and wheezes continually, pleading for help from his wife and his mother. By the last few minutes he has become completely infantilized: "Momma, Paul's sorry for what he's done. Mommy, help me. He's not a bad little boy. He always means well, help him." The bomb does not kill him, but his own panic does; he has a heart attack and dies.

The vulnerability and emotional distress of the dependent husband is mirrored in *Suspense* stories that center on the workplace. These usually focus on an underling employee who steals the firm's money, as in "Money Talks" (3 July

1947), or murders the co-worker who has been promoted over him, as in "Statement of Employee Henry Wilson" (26 Sept. 1946), or the boss who humiliates him, as in "Experiment 6R" (22 Sept. 1949). These protagonists deeply resent the emasculating position of the organization man and want to be in charge of their own destinies, ones with enough capital to put them beyond the boundaries of proper social roles. Their desire for independence, financial and otherwise, is also frequently sympathetically portrayed. The time and detail spent on their belittlement and frustration with not being able to get ahead musters feeling for them in the listener, although, like the career woman, they must pay for trying to upset the postwar balance.

The rage and paralysis of these men is made literal in James Stewart's portrayal of a paralyzed veteran in "Mission Completed" (1 Dec. 1949). Stewart's dependent state is made clear from the beginning of the program. He has been unable to move for four years: "Once in a while they dump me in a wheelchair and wheel me up and down the walk like I was a baby. Only babies can cry." Stewart is haunted by visions of his Japanese prison camp tormenter, Sukki. In the course of the narrative, Stewart identifies a Japanese flower shop worker as Sukki and regains mobility enough to attempt to kill him. But he has mistakenly identified the man, and his doctor and nurse (who have kept him under observation the whole time) foil his plan. Like other *Suspense* narrators, Stewart's character cannot be trusted. In this, he resembles film noir narrators who, as Kaja Silverman notes, do not serve as the transcendental "voice of god" male narrator most common in Hollywood films. These men cannot transcend their bodies and assume a position of objectivity; as such, they are not normal men (35). Similarly, men's voices in *Suspense* are also those of paralyzed, impotent men, men who have lost power or autonomy. While listeners are supposed to be horrified by their deviance, Stewart's anger and frustration are also very affecting and suggest how these narrators could also act as touchstones for listeners who felt a similar sense of trauma, paralysis, and alienation in postwar society.

On one hand, *Suspense* serves the dominant ideology by suggesting that "normal men" aren't disturbed killers, hysterics, or neurotics, just as "normal women" are not career women or femme fatales. On the other, of course, these programs served to destabilize postwar norms of gender and class by suggesting the omnipresence of such "abnormal" people and offering the possibility listener empathy. No setting in *Suspense* was more rife with potential horror and perversity, as well as opportunities for identification, than the most idealized Cold War environment: the home.

The Suburban Nightmare

The promotion of the suburban domestic ideal was part of a social containment plan to help make the United States seem strong and undivided during the Cold

War by reducing the possibility of internal conflict. Two of the most potentially disruptive groups coming out of the war were women and union laborers (May 164). By dangling the carrots of home ownership and consumer abundance, public policies (reinforced by numerous cultural discourses) functioned to effectively isolate these groups from each other and from their urban support systems. Class distinctions were blurred in suburban America, gender distinctions emphasized (May 162). The home became a weapon in the Cold War; the private became even more public through greater government standardization and regulation of domestic behavior. It is thus not surprising that the frustrations of *Suspense* characters are most often centered on the domestic front and its limitations.

The primacy of the home in radio thrillers suggests radio's unique suitability for this kind of story. Cold War social containment policies made the home and the body sites of ideological warfare. Proper gender behavior and child rearing became matters of national security (Corber 21): homosexuals were fired from their jobs, and women who did not want to have children were considered pathological. Radio's voices mirrored this invasion of domestic and bodily spaces. *Suspense* programs both acknowledged and exploited the confusion, paranoia, and horror potentially inherent in these invasive processes, functioning as a key site for their negotiation.

Because *Suspense* privileged the domestic and its audience, it included a larger variety of domestic mayhem than film gothics, which focused solely on the mistrust between couples. Postwar desires for money and the pressures of the nuclear family ideal played out in domestic suspense dramas in which siblings killed each other ("The Pasteboard Box," 17 Jan. 1946, and "The Sisters," 9 Dec. 1948) and grown children poisoned elderly relatives ("Pink Camellias," 27 Dec. 1945, and "Too Little to Live On," 7 Feb. 1946). By far the most common target for murder in *Suspense* narratives, however, is the wife who is stalked and killed by her husband. The husband kills his wife for a number of reasons: he's fallen in love with another woman, he wants his wife's money, he hates her because she nags him or ridicules him, she wants a divorce, or he simply wants the thrill of killing a woman who has power over him. Inevitably the husband's plans go awry and he ends up killing himself or his lover, or else he succeeds and then is caught by police.

These programs forcefully convey men's resentment of both female power and intelligence and the family wage system that confines them within suburbia. As Barbara Ehrenreich notes, women rather than corporate control were most often blamed culturally for men's discontent with suburban life (38). Yet even here *Suspense* shows differ from similar plots in film noirs or paranoid gothics. Nagging wives are usually portrayed as strong characters who make sound judgments about their husbands' character and motivations—the harpy is irritating but frequently on target. Thus it is not the mysterious femme fatale who is the

danger to men in *Suspense*, but more the everyday wife whose knowledge of her husband's inadequacies and fears makes him want to see her dead. It is not the new woman in the man's life who is the problem, but the woman who is already in his life.

In a few instances the husband kills his wife because he is afraid of her. Wives killing or threatening their husbands with violence is less common in *Suspense*, but it is the subject of a number of the genre's most powerful narratives. In gothic fictions and films, it is the woman who finds the house threatening (Doane 140). In *Suspense* gothics, this fear can extend to men as well. "The House in Cypress Canyon" (5 Dec. 1946) amply demonstrates the particular kinds of domestic horror that radio thrillers could convey. Actor Robert Taylor is the first-person narrator for this story about an "ordinary" husband, Jim, and his wife, Ellen, who discover that their newly rented home is inhabited by some kind of unspecified evil when they hear strange screams and find blood seeping out from under a closet door. Ellen touches the blood and becomes possessed by the evil. This is an unusually open-ended narrative for *Suspense* because the evil is never identified; it remains, in the husband's words, an "unnamed horror." This leaves the audience with the job of trying to name and understand it. Jim's description of Ellen's "insanity" gives listeners a clue; in one remarkable segment, he discovers her in the closet and describes her transformation:

Jim (narrating): "She stood there, rigid, her arms at her sides, her fingers extended like claws. Her hair was over her face; her eyes stared out of it. Her lips were drawn back in a grin like an animal at bay. For a moment I was frozen with the horror of it, but I stretched out my hand. And very deliberately she turned her head and sunk her teeth until they met into the flesh of my forearm! I raised my hand to strike at her but already she'd relaxed her hold and gone utterly limp. She would have fallen unless I had caught her. . . ."

[The next morning]

Ellen (yawning happily): "I had the most wonderful sleep, and I feel so rested."

It is easy to read this passage in terms of the husband's fear of his wife's deviant sexuality. The progression of Ellen's body from "rigid" to "limp" after biting her husband's arm and her happy wake-up the next morning suggest the male orgasm that follows penetration. There are other clues in the narrative that reinforce such a reading: this couple has been married for seven years but have no children. In the postwar world, where marriage became identified with children, they are perverse, far from the "ordinary family" Jim describes them being at the start of the narrative (May 142).

Ellen's aggression in the story is not only horrific but poisonous and ultimately lethal. When Jim consults a doctor about his arm, the doctor is shocked: "I've never seen anything like it before, that is, such a rapid onset of infection." Later, Jim concludes that Ellen is responsible for "tearing out the throat" of a local milkman, and resolves to kill her before she can do more harm. The narrative ends with the husband's murder of his wife and his suicide. The "evil" remains unexplained; the topic of female sexuality proves so dangerous that even the reality-based *Suspense* story must present it in terms of a ghost story.

What makes this story so effective on radio is the fact that the wife's monstrousness remains a figment of the listeners' imagination. Judith Halberstam notes that one of the differences between written gothic and film gothic is that the visible monster is never as horrific because there are boundaries to the body, keeping it separate from the viewer (3). There is something familiar and comforting about embodiment because it implies distance. Like literature, those boundaries don't exist on radio, either, so instead the horror remains within the listener's mind and is compounded by the "liveness" of the sound, which gives the radio thriller a reality written gothic does not have. When the wife in "Cypress Canyon" becomes a monster, she loses the power of speech, but her voice—especially her "unearthly cry"—remains a constant reminder for the audience of her deviance and its potentially lethal consequences. She is both more terrifying and more subversive, suggesting the power of the uncontrolled female to disrupt the suburban ideal.

In some cases women's "unearthly" sounds can be used to trap the husband/killer. "Fugue in C Minor" (1 June 1944) stars Ida Lupino as an independent young woman in turn-of-the-century Europe who is being wooed by a rich classical musician, played by Vincent Price. Price's late wife, he explains to Lupino, was going mad when she died, which he says accounts for the odd behavior of his two young children, who believe she haunts them. As the story progresses, however, Lupino begins to suspect that he has murdered his late wife, that *he* is the mad person in the story. Price loves music so much that he has had his house built around a huge pipe organ, and every time Price lies to Lupino about his wife, a note sticks in the organ, making a strong, low sound. The children are convinced it is their mother speaking to them, and eventually Lupino comes to share this view, especially when she discovers that the organ was Price's means of killing his wife. Price locks Lupino in a small room beneath the organ that loses air gradually as he plays; he tells her that he enjoys pitting women's screams against the classics until they run out of breath (literally killed by the canon). In this particular story, which takes as its subject the suffocation of the woman's voice (by the man's "organ," no less), two women find a way to communicate with each other and defeat the killer by appropriating an apparatus other than speech. The dead woman literally uses the man's "organ" to signal danger to her children and her successor, and they trap and kill her husband.

The sadism of the husband in "Fugue" is typical of the professional and/or intellectual men in domestic *Suspense* narratives. Again unlike films, where the good "doctor" restores the heroine to health through the "talking cure," the most "civilized" men in *Suspense* are inevitably the most sadistic and treacherous. The professional sadist is far less empathetic than the obsessed lover or frustrated employee; there is a clear class distinction between the male protagonists of the program. These rich or middle-class men are not traumatized veterans and seemingly have no emotions other than rage. The intensity of the men's anger toward women in these programs cannot be overemphasized, and because radio programs were not visual, they could often be far more explicit in their violence. In "Donovan's Brain" (18 and 25 May 1944), for example, scientist Orson Welles commits his wife to a mental hospital and severs the spinal cord of his son. In "No More Alice" (14 Mar. 1946), Paul Henreid plays a well-known psychiatrist who blackmails a fugitive he has been harboring into killing his harpy wife. English professor Herbert Marshall kills his wife on Christmas and buries her in the basement in "Holiday" (23 Dec. 1948), while in "Two Birds with One Stone" (17 May 1945), mystery writer Dana Andrews attempts to drown his wife and her little dog too.

Such portrayals must have resonated especially strongly with domestic listeners, who were being encouraged by society to revere and trust the professional man as both a husband and an "expert" in his field. The clinical description of the wife by her husband in "Cypress Canyon" echoes the postwar "expert" rhetoric that became so ubiquitous in the life of the suburban housewife. She is a case study of the out-of-control female whose problem has no name but whose symptoms were endlessly described by the newly emerging mental health industry. Women in the isolated suburbs put more stock in professional experts in the 1950s than ever before, and these programs suggested that they should be wary of doing so.

The conflation of the professional man with the controlling husband, and its potential for social critique, is most powerfully made in *Suspense's* 1948 dramatization of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," starring Agnes Moorehead. This story of a depressed wife driven mad by her domestic confinement and the patronizing attitudes of her husband and his sister is now, of course, considered a feminist classic. The husband, a doctor, refuses to believe his wife is sick. He keeps telling her there's "nothing wrong" with her and that she should trust him "because I'm a doctor." In her opening monologue, Moorehead confesses:

It's difficult being married to a doctor. John's an excellent doctor I'm sure but he's so inconsistent about me. He says I'm not really sick that I'm only a little run down from caring for the baby, that I have a temporarily nervous depression. . . . He absolutely forbids me to work

until I'm well again; he hates for me to write a word. But writing is such a relief to my mind, I can write down things—tell things here that—no, John says I musn't brood about those things.

Agnes Moorehead's performance is again remarkable. She suggests that her character's eventual madness is caused in part by the dual role she has to play: the contented, compliant wife to her husband vs. the depressed, frustrated self that is the story's narrator ("It makes me so tired not to show what I feel"). Moorehead changes her voice for each side of the character, playing the compliant wife in a "normal" tone, while muttering her critique of the role under her breath. The day they arrive at the house, they meet John's sister, Jenny, who's running the place for them, and Moorehead's character exchanges pleasantries with Jenny while muttering under her breath about Jenny's patronizing attitude: "They're alike as peas in a pod, Jenny and John, both efficient and kind. Both kind and both somehow cruel. But I don't *really* think that. . . . They smother me with concern, they *crush* me with kindness."

Unable to write, the narrator begins to go mad, believing she sees other women trapped beneath the yellow wallpaper in her room and struggling to get out—a metaphor for her own feelings of helplessness and imprisonment: "There are a great many women behind the pattern. . . . She's trying to get through but she can't because the pattern strangles everything." Finally she submerges her identity completely with her imagined friends: "I wonder if they all came out of the wallpaper as I did." She locks herself in her room, so her husband can't get at her, and screams to him triumphantly through the door: "I've got out at last, John, in spite of you and Jenny. . . . You'll never put me back."

The fact that this fifty-year-old story was reproduced for domestic audiences in the late 1940s suggests the relevance of its subject matter. Indeed, it's easy to see how female audiences of the time could have identified with Moorehead's feelings of isolation and depression. Like so many of *Suspense's* programs, "The Yellow Wallpaper" suggests that the root causes of women's madness are in their environment rather than in themselves. Gilman noted that she wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" not in order "to *drive* people crazy, but to save people from being *driven* crazy" (Gilman 657). *Suspense's* narratives seem to me to serve a similar function. While they do not offer a viable solution to postwar frustrations, they acknowledge the existence of those frustrations and therefore suggest that those who feel them are not insane or entirely alone.

In many ways, *Suspense* narratives served to overturn postwar structures and reveal the repressions and social controls upon which the image of postwar domestic bliss depended: the frustrations of career women and "organization" men, the corrupting power of a consumer society, the gendered nature of definitions of mental wellness, and the life-threatening dangers of suburban isolation. The popularity of these programs suggests both the power of radio's

domestic audience in shaping broadcasting content and the appeal and relevance of such dark stories for female audiences. (Film noirs have generally been associated with urban, male audiences (Maltby 66; Reid and Walker 60–66); the phenomenon of *Suspense* and other radio thrillers like it suggests the need for a reevaluation of the genre that takes into account the way in which these stories spoke to, and indeed were solicited by, radio's domestic audience.¹⁴)

Notes

I would like to thank Clark Farmer, Elizabeth Young, Michele Hilmes, Jason Loviglio, and especially Taylor Harrison for their help in shaping and editing this material. This essay is for my father, Kenneth J. McCracken, who exposed me to these programs at a highly impressionable age.

1. I am using the genre designation “thriller drama” instead of “suspense” because the former term was used to categorize these programs in the 1940s. It's also my way of differentiating *Suspense*, the program, from suspense as a genre. (The sixteen thriller drama programs from 1941 included adventure programs such as *The Lone Ranger* and *The Shadow*, crime programs such as *Gangbusters*, and a few horror and melodrama-tinged programs such as *I Love a Mystery*, *Mr. Keen*, *Tracer of Lost Persons*, and *Inner Sanctum*. The forty-three programs from 1946 were predominately crime or mystery programs, like *Suspense*, that were heavily influenced by horror and the hard-boiled detective novel (psychological realism, melodrama, graphic violence); these included *Bulldog Drummond*, *The Clock*, *Crime Doctor*, *Fat Man*, *House of Mystery*, *I Deal in Crime*, *Michael Shane: Detective*, *Mysterious Traveler*, and *The Adventures of the Thin Man* (Summers 94, 144).)

2. There are few books, scholarly or otherwise, that mention these programs, and none that analyzes their cultural significance in any depth. However, J. Fred MacDonald, John Dunning, and Gerald Nachman give helpful, detailed descriptions of detective and mystery programs in *Don't Touch That Dial!*, *The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio*, and *Raised on Radio*, respectively; James Naremore's recent book on film noir, *More Than Night*, acknowledges the existence of radio suspense but does not go into detailed analysis.

3. My study is based on a listening survey of over three hundred *Suspense* programs broadcast between 1942 and 1950. Although I have listened to episodes of several other 1940s thriller programs with similar content, most notably *Lights Out*, *Inner Sanctum*, and *The Whistler*, I have decided to limit this study to *Suspense* because it was the most prestigious, popular, and influential of these programs. It is also the most widely known today, with almost all of its 945 episodes commercially available.

4. *Suspense* was one of the first of radio's suspense dramas to be adapted for television, where it ran successfully from 1949 to 1954. It was the forerunner of and greatly influenced programs such as *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *The Twilight Zone*, with which it shared some writers and scripts.)

5. The only significant predecessor to 1940s suspense programs was NBC's *Lights Out*, a horror program that originated in Chicago in 1934. The brainchild first of Wyllis Cooper and then Arch Oboler, *Lights Out* pioneered many of the horror sound effects and stream-of-consciousness storytelling techniques that would be widely imitated by the thriller programs of the 1940s.

6. Herrmann's music is only one of many links between *Suspense* and Hitchcock that are worthy of further investigation. Hitchcock drew on the same writers as *Suspense* for many of his films and television programs (most notably Cornell Woolrich), and the paranoid gothic was a favorite genre of his (*Rebecca*, 1940; *Suspicion*, 1941). In addition, several of Hitchcock's key film stars played roles on *Suspense* very similar to those they would later play for Hitchcock—note especially the similarities between Jimmy Stewart's role in *Suspense*'s

"Mission Accomplished" (1949) as a paralyzed veteran and his role in *Rear Window* (1954), and Cary Grant's roles in *Suspense's* "The Black Curtain" (1944) and *North by Northwest* (1959). In the case of Joseph Cotton, his role as a psychopath in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) anticipates rather than follows his multiple appearances in similar roles on *Suspense*.

7. Scholar James Naremore has noted that 1950s gothic comic books were censored for content that seems to have been very similar to that of *Suspense*. Comic books were more vulnerable because they were lowbrow and aimed at children. While some parent groups did begin to criticize *Suspense's* graphic content in the late 1940s, there is no evidence of the same kind of censorship taking place (Naremore 34).

8. Examples of such films include *Shadow of a Doubt* (Hitchcock, 1943), *Gaslight* (Cukor, 1944), *Laura* (Preminger, 1944), *Undercurrent* (Minnelli, 1946), *Sorry, Wrong Number* (Litvak, 1948), *Sleep My Love* (Sirk, 1948), and *Sudden Fear* (Miller, 1952).

9. Cornell Woolrich's work was adapted for *Suspense* thirty-one times, more than that of any other writer, and was also frequently adapted for film noir and the paranoid gothic (most famously in *Rear Window*). Frank Krutnik notes that the influence of horror elements on the crime film is most evident in Woolrich's work; he calls him the "prime exponent of the psychological suspense thriller" (13). The fact that Woolrich was homosexual may have contributed to his ability to sympathize with the outsider and social deviant.

10. Major Hollywood studios supported this practice by not letting their star players portray killers or deviants (Grams 45–46).

11. Agnes Moorehead's personal archive is filled with glowing reviews of her performance in "Sorry, Wrong Number." Many of these notices came from subsequent rebroadcasts of the original program. See, for example, *Newsweek* 3 Feb. 1947: 54; *Time* 10 Sept. 1945: 57; *Life* 24 Sept. 1945: 91.

12. I thank Paul Green for this insight.

13. Elizabeth Cowie makes a strong argument for women's enjoyment of film noir based on the aggressive sexuality and power of the film noir woman. I would agree, and I would add that the plethora of traumatized and vulnerable men populating the genre might also have been an attraction for female audiences. Indeed, I would echo Richard Dyer's query, "[W]hose fantasy is film noir—men's or women's?" (qtd. in Kaplan 38). I think *Suspense* programs make a good argument for the latter.

14. Reid and Walker dispute the historical relevance of noir for its audiences, instead arguing that film noir was simply "one of many devices. . . . to captivate the restive mass audience or retain the hardcore one. Sex, death and pop nihilism could be depended upon to accomplish the latter, then as now" (59–60). Movies in the film noir genre were indeed considered to be B films, thrillers made to keep urban audiences in their seats. *Suspense's* prestige and popularity among domestic listeners would suggest, however, that these stories were socially relevant in a number of ways that have not been acknowledged.

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CHAPTER 10**RADIO'S "CULTURAL FRONT,"
1938-1948**

Judith E. Smith

MICHAEL DENNING HAS CALLED NEW ATTENTION to radical culture's contribution to radio in the 1930s. Replacing an older categorization that identified social commitments primarily in terms of support or challenge to the American Communist Party, Denning groups writers and cultural producers by tracing their inspiration from and collaboration with a broad range of progressive social insurgencies in the 1930s. The most prominent social insurgencies included the momentous new Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) union drives, more public challenges to segregationist practices and civic toleration of lynching, and popular internationalist campaigns calling attention to the unfreedom of people facing new dangers from fascism and continuing burdens of colonialism. Although 1930s radical culture has been primarily identified as proletarian literature, and secondarily in terms of left-wing theater and film, Denning adds a wide range of collective associations (literary clubs, composers collectives, writers unions), literary and musical forms (ghetto pastorals, gangster novels, jazz, blues, musical theater), and performance venues (Broadway theaters, parades, and left-wing benefits). Denning stresses the importance of radio, arguing that when they gained access to radio's broad audience, Cultural Front writers gained their greatest popular success and contributed a left-wing political sensibility to the radio plays, variety formats, and musical series they helped to create.

This article will investigate one aspect of Cultural Front radio—the struggle by radicals, from the late 1930s, to contest radio's imaginary community as white, nonethnic, and middle class by self-consciously asserting African Americans and

the children of immigrants as paradigmatic American citizens. The structures of commercial sponsorship, the popular formulas for commercially successful programming, and a supposedly fixed boundary prohibiting political commentary constituted substantial constraints that radio's Cultural Front had to circumvent. Before the war, radicals worked creatively in the political interstices created by the hybridity between performance of news and news-infused performance. After Pearl Harbor, the opportunities and dramatic frameworks for political appeals on radio multiplied exponentially, and radical practices effectively defied the supposed prohibition on political messages throughout the war years and until the late 1940s.

Radicals' work in radio familiarized and legitimated several distinctive forms of social address. The most characteristic of these Cultural Front interventions, intended to rhetorically rebuke the fascism sweeping through Europe, were broadcasts reformulating American history to stress ordinary people, rather than powerful and wealthy politicians and business leaders, as inventors and sustainers of American democracy. The most pointed interventions claimed racial heterogeneity as positive and racial justice as foundational rather than exceptional aspects of American democracy. These introduced key nonwhite historical figures and performers as model American citizens, and nonwhite folk traditions as seminal sources of American culture. The success of Cultural Front radicals in radio made it relatively easy for many of them to move into careers in film. In radio and then in film, their daring in defining ethnic and nonwhite working people as "ordinary" and even exemplary Americans was especially provocative after the war, when the centerpiece of right-wing political mobilization was its claim to monopolize the definition of who could be considered as American.

As many radio historians have observed, broadcast prohibitions on "political" content were clearly subject to interpretation and were mainly observable through their breach. Radio's special qualities of immediacy and intimacy challenged any potential for actual boundaries between commercial, entertainment, and political content; the history of radio is replete with stories explicating the hybrid appeal of those most successful at exploiting radio's special form of address, including FDR and Father Coughlin as well as Mary Margaret McBride.¹ The national networks' periodic displays of policing the boundaries, for example, refusing to air a series of 1936 radio ads for the Republican National Committee, "Liberty at the Crossroads," because their reliance on a soap opera format constituted a prohibited "dramatization of political argument," were revealed to be inconsequential when local stations broadcast the programs anyway.²

Nonetheless, the stated prohibition could be and was utilized selectively, reinforcing the normative middle-class and white presumptions within radio's characteristic form of address and effectively limiting radical access to broadcasting. For example, unions reported that they were often unable to buy radio

time or gain access to unsponsored time on national networks before 1942. The stated prohibition also promoted a kind of informal self-censorship. Gertrude Berg, creator of the popular serial comedy *The Goldbergs*, later explained her interpretation of the boundaries in a 1956 interview: "You see, darling, don't bring up anything that will bother people. That's very important. Unions, politics, fund-raising, Zionism, socialism, intergroup relations. I don't stress them. And after all, aren't all such things secondary to daily family living?"³

Any mention of race outside entertainment minstrelsy was considered by definition to invoke the unacceptably political. As a medium, radio was nearly impenetrable for nonwhite performers, who could only find work in broadcasting by playing parts as servants or minstrels if they approximated the accents white actors, directors, and producers had popularized as "black." By the late 1930s even local musical programming, which had sometimes provided an opening for African-American dance bands and singing groups earlier in the decade, was largely replaced by network programming. On the networks, jazz dance music was usually performed by white musicians, and black singing groups were called on to perform only as a part of a plantation or minstrelsy setup, or on a Sunday program featuring spirituals. Only very occasionally were African-American star performers featured guests on variety shows or concert programs.⁴

The whiteness of radio broadcasting grew out of unspoken, widely accepted, and long-standing conventions, but it was carefully monitored and enforced. In the late 1930s the expanding dominion of the national networks and their commercial sponsors *increased* the power of southern segregationists to demand radio representations reinforcing customary racial separation, and to keep anything else off the air. Even when civil rights activism pushed racial concerns into news forums, such as in a proposed series entitled *The Catholic Church and the Negro Question*, sponsored by the Catholic Church on a local Memphis station in 1935, threatening phone calls were able to cancel the programming. If the NAACP wanted to invite speakers in Baltimore in 1939 to discuss segregation at the University of Maryland, station management canceled its scheduled local broadcast. When the white national president of the NAACP, Arthur Spingarn, departed from the remarks approved for him as a guest on the *Southernaires'* gospel show in order to criticize racial discrimination, NBC canceled the guest speaker portion of the show altogether.⁵

Progressives viewed gaining broadcast access for more complex dramatic representations of African Americans as an essential part of the battle to claim full citizenship. Progressive African-American actors repeatedly attempted to get stories of ordinary as well as heroic African Americans on the air. For a brief period in the early 1930s a group of stage actors broadcast weekly radio dramas about black life in New York on local radio. This group was organized by a young Morgan College graduate named Carlton Moss, and it included the distinguished actors Rose McClendon and Ernest Whitman. Moss had come to New

York with a group of actors from black colleges who had performed on black campuses as a troupe named *Toward a Black Theater*. A network series in 1933 included an episode called "John Henry: Black River Giant," performed by the actor Juano Hernandez as particularly heroic and powerful. (Rose McClendon also appeared on the series.) The task of representing black families, made especially invisible by mammy and minstrel caricature, seemed particularly urgent, culturally and politically. In 1935 the New York City Board of Education broadcast on a local New York network a serial drama acted, written, and directed by African Americans, *A Harlem Family*, portraying the trials and tribulations of an ordinary African-American family during the Depression.⁶ But these remained isolated incidents against the stranglehold of presumptively white programming on radio.

Given this censorship of explicit political discourse, theatrical innovation associated with social upheaval and protest *outside* of radio was especially important. It encouraged writers to depart from generic formulas and to enlarge their imagination of the political by experimenting with new representations of "ordinary" people, which they hoped would enable them to speak powerfully to a new and broader audience. In contrast to a perceived decline in established theatrical institutions and as an alternative to the stated limitations of radio, popular theater flourished in the 1930s. Links between theatrical performance and insurgent social movements generated dramatic treatments of social issues, departures in dramatic form, and new kinds of audiences and actors. New attempts at popular theater ranged from the more than four hundred workers' theater groups loosely affiliated with the Communist Party and the topical musical revues nurtured in New York's labor movement summer camps, to the New York Group Theater's attempt to merge a new psychological realist style with social concerns and new alternative black theater groups in New York, Chicago, Cleveland, and Los Angeles.

The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) built on and expanded experimentation with popular theater, social drama, and political address. Many left-wing theater activists found temporary employment within FTP projects, which served as a way station in between street theater, and commercial media for many progressive writers, actors, and dramatists. For example, Rose McClendon directed the Negro People's Theatre's adaptation of *Waiting for Lefty* in Harlem during the summer of 1935 and then helped form the Negro theater unit of the Federal Theatre Project, under the direction of John Houseman with the assistance of Carlton Moss. This unit's numerous productions between 1935 and 1939 included the black-cast *Macbeth*, set in Haiti, directed by the young actor and anonymous radio announcer Orson Welles, and a play about the slave uprising in Haiti, written by the African-American scholar and writer W. E. B. Du Bois. Arthur Miller's prize-winning student play about a strike was produced by the Detroit Federal Theatre Project in October 1937, and after he graduated from

college he was briefly employed by a New York branch of the Federal Theatre Project in 1939. The composer Earl Robinson moved from the Workers Theater into the FTP in 1935, where, joined by poet John LaTouche, he wrote a topical musical revue, *Sing for Your Supper*, performed in 1939. Nicholas Ray moved from New York's Theater of Action to the FTP, where he worked with Joseph Losey directing the 1936 Living Newspaper productions *Triple A Plowed Under* and *Injunction Granted*.⁷

Much of the new popular drama grew out of the cross-fertilization between news and drama characteristic of the decade, from tabloid journalism and Warner Brothers crime stories to film montage and the "stage newsreel" of the Living Newspaper plays. First appearing in 1931, radio's own newsmagazine *March of Time* popularized news as reenactment, blending reportage and melodrama.⁸ News commentary became identified with first-person narration, providing listeners with what radio writer-producer and later media historian Erik Barnouw described as a "vicarious experience of what they were living and observing. It put the listener in another man's shoes" (*History* 151).

After 1934 radio moved to capture some of the excitement of new popular theater on the air. The new relationship between theater and radio was signaled when Columbia University began to offer a course on writing plays for radio in 1937. Commercial hegemony over the airwaves was institutionalized in the Communications Act of 1934, despite public debate and vocal opposition, but the combination of the agitation and the act prodded the networks to expand their noncommercial public service offerings. Both government-sponsored programming and unsponsored or "sustaining" programming on the networks provided openings for left-inflected broadcasts. In just one example of state-sponsored access, Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*, the melange of political urgency and domestic melodrama that became the signature work of contemporary radical theater, was broadcast in 1938 on the Federal Theatre Project's own radio division. This division was also responsible for a radio dramatization of Pietro di Donato's searing working-class novel (and 1939 Book of the Month Club popular selection) *Christ in Concrete*.⁹

CBS's announcement of a new noncommercial drama series, *Columbia Workshop*, in the winter of 1935–1936 offered one network opportunity for progressive writers to get original drama on network airtime and reach a wider audience with their work. When well-known and acclaimed poets, dramatists, and writers, including Stephen Vincent Benét, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Maxwell Anderson, Dorothy Parker, and James Thurber, donated their literary prestige by accepting radio's invitation to speak through radio's popular medium on *Columbia Workshop*, they provided legitimacy for a wide range of left writers and left themes.

For example, the prize-winning poet Archibald MacLeish, who had become active in Popular Front organizations by 1935, wrote a verse play for radio, *The*

Fall of the City, broadcast in April 1937, that seemed to predict Hitler's subsequent conquest of Austria. Using radio to voice concerns about the threat of European fascism invited authors to reinvent radio's own formulas as a means of dramatizing political concerns. For example, Michael Denning has called attention to MacLeish's inventive use of a radio announcer who was not in control of the action—a striking departure from formula radio, where normally the characters controlled the plot—as a strategy to dramatize the threat of fascism (382–83). Orson Welles, who played the role of the narrator in MacLeish's broadcast, then made use of the device on stage by using radio's eminently recognizable news commentator H. V. Kaltenborn to “report” the action in his modern-dress fascist allegory production of *Julius Caesar* in September 1938. Denning argued that by the time Welles used this device again in his 30 October 1938 Mercury Theatre adaptation of *War of the Worlds*, it was recognizably part of an antifascist radio aesthetic. MacLeish also used the radio announcer's reporting of fascism in another radio play, *Air Raid*, broadcast just a few days before the “War of the Worlds”. Norman Corwin, a newspaper movie reviewer turned radio news editor actively experimenting with drama on CBS radio, also used the image of the fascist air raid in his second radio play, *They Fly through the Air with the Greatest of Ease*, broadcast in February 1939.

Radio's appropriation of historical pageantry presented an opportunity for other left-wing writers to write historical and biographical sketches celebrating explicit contrasts between American popular traditions of democracy and fascist political culture. In the late 1930s this kind of broadcast became increasingly infused with political meanings, especially given the imperative to produce home-front “morale-building” programs, drawing on what Michele Hilmes termed “radio's unique nationalizing address” in the service of promoting cultural unity for war mobilization (230). Socially concerned writers frequently used references to Lincoln, abolition, and the Civil War for popular democratic inspiration. For example, Norman Corwin arranged portions from Stephen Vincent Benét's 1928 Pulitzer Prize-winning work, *John Brown's Body*, for broadcast on *Columbia Workshop* in 1939. Corwin and Earl Robinson arranged an adaptation of Carl Sandburg's *The People, Yes* for *Columbia Workshop* in May 1941 (Sandburg had won the 1939 Pulitzer Prize for his multivolume biography of Lincoln). Innovative studio sound techniques, including the use of filters and an echo chamber developed by the program's original studio engineer, Irving Reis, and the use of original music, some of which was composed by Bernard Herrmann, enhanced the aural effectiveness of dramatic performance on the air.¹⁰

Cavalcade of America, sponsored by DuPont on NBC beginning in 1935, provided an opportunity for writers after 1940, and especially after Pearl Harbor, to reorient conventional accounts of American history to highlight ordinary people's contributions to popular democracy and dissent. Although the corporate-specified limits prohibited an important set of subjects—no mention of war, mil-

itarism, the labor movement, or African Americans—writers still managed to interject a progressive framework, for example, proposing historical precedents for solidarity across national borders as an alternative to isolationism.¹¹ Popular prize-winning dramatists and poets Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, Carl Sandburg, and Stephen Vincent Benét lent their literary authority to this project by agreeing to write individual broadcasts. But especially during the war, *Cavalcade's* regular writers included a roster of radicals. These included Norman Rosten, a left-wing poet and writer who was inspired by MacLeish's *Fall of the City* to explore radio; Peter Lyons, a writer for *March of Time*, who also wrote for the CIO and served as president of the Radio Writers Guild in 1944; and Morton Wishengrad, educational director of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), American Federation of Labor (AFL) director of the AFL-CIO Labor Shortwave Bureau, and writer of *Labor for Victory*, NBC's weekly fifteen-minute broadcast alternating AFL and CIO accounts of labor's contribution to the war effort.¹²

Arthur Miller, another one of *Cavalcade's* writers, has commented retrospectively about a radical's niche on the show in the early 1940s. Then an aspiring left-wing playwright, Miller won the dubious status of "utility man" for the show based on his ability to quickly produce a script relying on historical research. He could not be fully public about his affiliations; he described stuffing his copies of *The Nation* or *New Masses* deeper into his pocket before he picked up his assignments at Batton, Barton, Durstine and Osborn (BBDO), the big corporate advertising agency producing the show for DuPont. But he consciously did what he could to push against the corporate limits of the sponsorship. In one example he reshaped a script about Benito Juárez, which DuPont planned to broadcast on Pan American Day as a gesture toward its business investments "south of the border," into a celebration of Juárez as a peasant revolutionary sharing unusual democratic convictions with his contemporary Abraham Lincoln (Miller 203-7). Miller's script, "Thunder from the Hills," was read on the air by Orson Welles, 26 April 1942.¹³

Radio's appropriation of the variety format provided another opening for progressives to represent visions of popular democracy. As mentioned above, the topical musical revue was a staple of left-wing culture in venues such as the labor movement's summer camps, including the ILGWU's Camp Unity in the Poconos, and fraternal organization auxiliary entertainments. Denning noted that the topical musical revue was also one of the ingredients of Popular Front musical theater such as Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937), Harold Rome's *Pins and Needles* (1937), and Duke Ellington's *Jump for Joy* (1941), which popularly fused political expression with musical idioms from vaudeville, Tin Pan Alley, and jazz (Denning 283-322). When, in the fall of 1939, CBS's head of sustaining programs asked Norman Corwin to direct a new variety program, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, to promote "national self-awareness and pride" among

Americans, Corwin drew partly on these precedents, as he conceived of the show as an opportunity to showcase performances that could celebrate a multiethnic and sometimes interracial workingman's democracy.¹⁴

Pursuit of Happiness's first broadcast, in November 1939, signaled its political direction. In one skit, black comedian Eddie Green played the part of Columbus. A reading from *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, Robert Sherwood's popular and prize-winning play, was performed by the actor Raymond Massey, who played Lincoln in the stage performance. The show was emceed by Burgess Meredith, who would later be called on to perform as America's favorite "everyman" when he was cast as Ernie Pyle in the 1945 film *The Story of GI Joe*. The fourth show's variety mix included a Hawaiian song, a humorous monologue on buying clothes, a report on American folklore about rattlesnake oil, and a vignette by literary critic Carl Van Doren on Benjamin Franklin (the subject of his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography). Its culmination was an extraordinary moment of political address—the stunning performance of African-American sports hero, concert singer, and progressive political activist Paul Robeson singing "Ballad for Americans"—for which the shows' producers had paid fees twice their normal rate. Although Robeson was already an international celebrity, he had had very little access to prime time airwaves, and this material, "Ballad for Americans," was very much a product of a left-wing topical musical revue sensibility, written originally by radicals John LaTouche and Earl Robinson for a Federal Theatre Project Broadway production.¹⁵

The political significance of Robeson's performance of "Ballad for Americans" on *Pursuit of Happiness* has been analyzed elsewhere.¹⁶ Here I want to emphasize three particular aspects of this performance. The subject, a folk ballad revision of American history that emphasized an inclusive racial and gendered as well as ethnic vision of "the people," overlapped other forms of progressive radio production; Erik Barnouw described it in 1945 as "the musical wing of the development of documentary drama" (Radio 240). The song contained an unusually explicit reference to lynching and a strong argument for civil rights ("men in white skin can never be free while his brother is in slavery"). Finally, the material became inseparable from Robeson's performance of it; his powerful classical baritone voice and his personal and political authority made his rendition of the song an insistent enactment of the need for full African-American citizenship to redeem democracy's unfulfilled promise.¹⁷

Pursuit of Happiness's combination of Americana and variety also provided broadcast opportunities for the topical musical revue of Betty Comden and Adolph Green; the comic routines of a son of a garment worker turned Borscht-belt entertainer, Danny Kaye; and the talking blues of dust bowl ballad singer Woody Guthrie. Celebrating American democracy could even stretch to include a radio opera on the Magna Carta written by Maxwell Anderson and Kurt Weill, with the help of Walter Huston as singing narrator. But despite the

excitement generated by Robeson's performance, the show provided few openings for black-produced material. For example, Langston Hughes's biographer, Arnold Rampersad, noted that Hughes submitted two scripts to the show that were turned down. These included his musical play, *The Organizer*, which was deemed "too controversial for us to give it an emotional treatment on an essentially dramatic show." Hughes was only able to sell a script on the presumably less controversial subject of Booker T. Washington, to be aired on 7 April 1940, the day the US Post Office released a stamp with his likeness (Rampersad 384). Corwin expressed his own frustrations in a memo to the network in which he described the format as "merely a new framework for old and conventional and outworn elements," and the series ended on 5 May 1940 after about thirty performances.¹⁸

Expanding the racial and class definition of "American" through folk music was the progressive impulse behind the popular folk music show *Back Where I Come From*, produced by Alan Lomax and Nicholas Ray for CBS in the fall of 1940 and the winter of 1941. This show featured regular performances by southern African-American blues singers Leadbelly and Josh White, the Jubilee gospel group, the Golden Gate Quartet, and Woody Guthrie. Lomax had been collecting folk music and running the Archive of American Folk Music for the Library of Congress; he had assumed radio to be indistinguishable from its commercial formulas until he heard Corwin's broadcasts. Ray had moved from the Federal Theatre Project to organizing rural theater activities for the Department of Agriculture's Resettlement Administration and for the WPA's Recreation Division. He saw radio as a new venue for what he termed "Folk Theater." Lomax recalled that Ray provided the "sense of theatre and drama" enabling their folk music program to achieve a popular breakthrough: "It was the first time America had ever heard itself and it went into all the schools."¹⁹

Government agencies with a mandate to expand the popular understandings of citizenship as social preparation for possible entry into World War II also used a kind of hybrid historical pageantry/variety format when they tentatively made forays into radio production. These included the Office of Education's series *Americans All—Immigrants All*, on CBS in 1938 and 1939, which broadcast one show called "The Negro" and one called "The Jews of the United States," as part of a rhetorical strategy to extend the terms of who might be seen as American. A second series, *Freedom's People*, broadcast on NBC in 1941 and 1942, used black history and culture to argue, in Barbara Savage's terms, that American culture was "driven by and dependent on black cultural contributions." It included performances by African-American entertainers associated with progressive activism, such as Robeson, Josh White, the Golden Gate Quartet, and Canada Lee.²⁰

Another government initiative came from the new federal radio division inside the Office of Facts and Figures, which in November 1941 commissioned

Norman Corwin to write a radio broadcast to dramatize the 150th anniversary of the Bill of Rights. To be broadcast in prime time on all networks simultaneously, this show was intended to celebrate American popular democratic traditions to implicitly heighten the contrast with the fascist threat encircling Europe. When the program, *We Hold These Truths*, was broadcast on 15 December, it was just one week after Pearl Harbor had been attacked, and its enthusiastic audience was estimated at sixty million. Its praise of ordinary citizens, especially soldier-citizens, did not explicitly include African-American soldiers. The *Variety* reviewer recognized the precedents that made its political format familiar, describing the show as a “modern attempt to translate into the vernacular the abstract idealism of ideas exemplified on the screen by Frank Capra, on the stage by Robert Sherwood, in poetry by Carl Sandburg, Stephen Vincent Benét, and Corwin himself.” Of course, these “ideas” from screen, stage, and poetry had been made familiar precisely because they had been previously broadcast on shows like *Columbia Workshop*, *Pursuit of Happiness*, and Orson Welles’s *Mercury Theatre Playhouse*.²¹

The appearance on the airwaves of progressive social messages did not go unquestioned. As noted previously, the political boundaries of radio were extremely difficult to police, but congressional conservatives tried to challenge this direction. The Dies-led House Committee on Un-American Activities began to “investigate” broadcasting after 1940. In September 1941 Gerald Nye, a prominent isolationist known for anti-Semitic sentiments, called for Senate investigation into “Moving Picture Screen and Radio Propaganda.” But the logic of “preparedness” prevailed, and the hearings were quickly adjourned.²²

The attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent declaration of war immediately and dramatically enlarged the openings for progressives on the radio. Now the concerns of the Cultural Front were, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from the goals of promoting support for the military effort and wartime unity; the national cultural mission embraced using radio to expand the representations of ordinary Americans, especially to envision citizen-soldiers as black as well as white, and to highlight the distance between fascism and popular democracy. This convergence encouraged the “dramatization of political messages” supposedly outlawed by network policy and blurred the boundaries around partisan social protest, especially for progressives writing for radio in wartime. Many radicals warmed to this task; as Norman Rosten wrote, “Propaganda is no longer a literary problem. It is the Idea that fights.” Stephen Vincent Benét, whose 1942 radio play *They Burned the Books* dramatically evoked the threat of fascism, spoke for many writers when he wrote, “I am neither afraid nor ashamed of the word propaganda. I am neither afraid nor ashamed of the fact that American writers are speaking out today for a cause in which they believe. I cannot conceive it to be the business of the writer to turn his eyes away from life because the fabric of life is shaken.”²³

Although formulaic statements of democratic inclusion circulated widely, and a melting-pot list of names surfaced repeatedly in descriptions of any group supporting the war, progressive radio writers were often the ones responsible for attempts to consciously include African-American characters as ordinary Americans, and to refer to racial inequality and anti-Semitism as barriers to the achievement of America's promise.²⁴ Soldiers continued to be overwhelmingly likely to be represented as white, but a 1943 series supported by the left-wing Hollywood Writers Mobilization called *Free World Theater* sponsored a drama about black soldiers, "Something about Joe," written by noted black actors Milton Merlin and Clarence Muse and starring Hazel Scott and Lena Horne. Norman Corwin wrote a drama about Dorie Miller, the unsung African-American navy messman who took over for a gunner downed at Pearl Harbor. *Dorie Got a Medal* was broadcast on CBS in April 1944, featuring Canada Lee, Josh White, and the Golden Gate Quartet, with music written by Josh White and Langston Hughes.

A 1944 radio series, *They Call Me Joe*, featured eleven separate programs narrated by a fictional serviceman telling his family history in order to represent America's distinct ethnic and racial groups. Its theme song was taken from "Ballad for Americans," made famous by Paul Robeson in his electrifying 1939 radio performance. The series' writers included Norman Rosten and Morton Wishengrad. It was broadcast within the United States as part of NBC's University of the Air and overseas by the Armed Forces Radio Service. The opening line of each program reiterated the military melting pot: "My name is José—they call me Joe," or "My name is Giuseppe—they call me Joe," or "My name is Josef—they call me Joe." The final episode was about Japanese Americans. By 1944 congressional conservatives were powerful enough to challenge Major Paul Horgan, the producer responsible for the show in the War Department's Information and Education Division. Hogan was asked directly to defend the use of the theme song (probably because of its links to Robeson and his provocative militancy) and the rhetorical use of the name *Joe* (suspected to be a coded celebration of Josef Stalin).²⁵ Nonetheless, the show was broadcast as planned.

Within the military, some progressive writers who enlisted or were drafted got assigned to write for radio, with permission to develop antifascist and antiracist themes, as these seemed to express some aspect of the military's wartime ideology. A radio writer such as Arnold Perl, making a living producing formula drama, felt suddenly freed to express his political convictions, especially his antifascism: "I have gotten radio detectives in and out of trouble, scared children and fought straw men on so-called adult programs, but it took a draft board to give me my first chance to write something for radio I didn't mind having my name connected with." Before Pearl Harbor, he commented, "every minor blow sounded for decency and progress on the air" was "like pulling teeth." Now part of his military work was to write for CBS's army series,



Paul Robeson performs during a CBS broadcast. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater.

Assignment Home, to keep the public informed about life and work in the army. This gave him a chance to dramatize war stories in the language of the battle against fascism, “the most important foe America has ever faced in her history.”²⁶

The radio career of Millard Lampell can serve to illustrate some of the multiple openings for a left-wing political sensibility on radio in this period. After attending college on a football scholarship in the late 1930s, Lampell wrote for the left-wing magazine *Friday* and for the *New Republic*, and formed the Almanac Singers with Pete Seeger, Lee Hayes, and Woody Guthrie. The Almanacs performed folk songs at picket lines, union halls, lumber camps, and miners’ halls from Minnesota to Montana to the West Coast. As an Almanac singer, Lampell also joined the Communist Party. Lampell’s first radio performance was in February 1942, when Norman Corwin recorded the Almanac Singers’ topical

square dance, "Round and Round Hitler's Grave," for the first of his thirteen-part *This Is War* series, broadcast on the combined national networks. Then Lampell was employed by Himan Brown, the original radio producer of *The Rise of the Goldbergs*, at this time producer of several popular soaps and a mystery show, to write most of the episodes for *Green Valley USA*, a "patriotic" radio series about an American community at war, which used soap-style narration and music to introduce home-front themes of racial discrimination, Lend-Lease, and the black market. Lampell also wrote about American workingmen folk heroes Mike Fink, John Henry, and Jim Bridger for another commercial series, *The Prudential Family Hour*. After he was drafted, he resigned from the party and continued to write radio dramas in the military, particularly for two Army Air Corps series, *First in the Air* and *Wings for Tomorrow*.²⁷

First in the Air was intended to prepare GIs and their families for the adjustments that would be required upon the soldiers' return home. Lampell's scripts, later published as *The Long Way Home*, focused on how wounded vets might be reintegrated after the war, and two of these called particular attention to wounds generated by racial discrimination. "The Boy from Nebraska," about the only Japanese-American tailgunner, Ben Kuroki, contrasted his heroism with incidents of anti-Japanese harassment in California, Arizona, Oregon, and New Jersey; it won a Writers' War Board award and a citation from the US War Relocation Authority. "Case History" was the profile of a heroic pilot with the African-American Ninety-Ninth Fighter Squadron in Italy. Lampell wanted to use the medium of radio to claim and perform these soldiers' Americanness. In his staging directions, Lampell suggested that Kuroki's part be read in a "quiet plain Midwest American" accent, and that American folk tunes be played in a minor key after each incident of racial prejudice (169–70). Similarly, he suggested that his African-American character, Ashborn, have no special accent in order that "the audience does not know the central character is a Negro until quite late in the play," although he noted that the details—the family history, the (classical) poem he remembers, his first experience of flying—"were especially significant because they were happening to a Negro" (172). Lampell's logic here provides an example of what Michele Hilmes has identified "a rhetoric of inclusion deployed strategically that *denies* racial distinctions in favor of a transcendent democratic national identity." (Hilmes notes that this rhetoric coexisted with "a discourse of fear that *depends* upon racial distinction to motivate white participation"[256].) But without the progressive writers' conscious intervention, "transcendent democratic national identity" might have been represented by generic narrative references to "brotherhood," with racially marked characters totally absent.

In 1944 Norman Corwin broadcast *Lonesome Train*, Lampell's 1942 documentary opera eulogizing Lincoln, a partly sung, partly spoken folk ballad with music by Earl Robinson, on CBS. Lampell posed Lincoln's heroism as a modern-day fight for freedom, his refrain offering a familiar formulation: "Freedom's a

thing that has no ending / It needs to be cared for, it needs defending / a great job for many hands, carrying freedom 'cross the land!" Lincoln's "people" reiterated the common characterization of the military melting pot: a Kansas farmer, a Brooklyn sailor, an Irish policeman, and a Jewish tailor. His presence was invoked in a black church, a Kansas dance, and a Cleveland hospital ward. Lincoln's climactic counter to the critics who proposed "America for Americans" was "the strongest bond of human sympathy, outside your family, of course, should be the one uniting all working people, of all nations, tongues and kindreds." After FDR died in April 1945, *Lonesome Train* became the most widely played radio program, broadcast by local stations across the country as the train carrying FDR's body traveled back to the Capitol.²⁸

African-American progressives were responsible for the most fully realized racially distinct characters, but their access to radio continued to be much harder to come by and much more likely to be local than national. One documented example is *New World A-Coming*, a New York program unaffiliated with any of the major networks, broadcast beginning in March 1944. When WMCA, under the management of Nathan Straus, decided to commit a weekly half-hour sustaining show on Sunday afternoons to a series on "Negro life," it purchased the broadcast rights and title of journalist and progressive activist Roi Ottley's compelling descriptions of race experience and race politics in Harlem, published in 1943.²⁹ Ottley drew on materials collected by the Negro unit of the New York Federal Writers' Project when he served as its director, and his book was extremely wide-ranging, challenging any simple categorization of race by describing contemporary Harlem's diverse peoples of color; celebrating its distinct cultural expressions, from rent parties and blues clubs to drag balls; and analyzing a broad spectrum of race-conscious politics, from Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association to Father Divine's Peace Mission, A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Council for Negro Women, and Max Yergen and the National Negro Congress. Ottley's book was framed by the notion that the war, and anti-colonial insurgency throughout the world, were carrying forward the fight for racial equality. Confidence in this momentum shaped the title of the book, inspired a tone poem by Duke Ellington which Ellington performed in his Carnegie Hall concert in December 1943, and the vision for the radio show itself.³⁰ While consistently featuring the accomplishments of African Americans, the show simultaneously called attention to the injustice of racial discrimination's placing so many obstacles in their way—precisely the territory made invisible and off-limits in mainstream broadcasting.

New World A-Coming relied on a variety format as well as a hybrid documentary drama form to convey its political messages. Shows instructively and delightfully showcased black performers, many of whom were publicly identified with

resisting racial injustice. Its featured theme song was also composed by Duke Ellington, and it broadcast performances by concert singer Marian Anderson, actors Canada Lee, Muriel Smith, and Hilda Simms, jazz pianist and singer Hazel Scott, and blues singers Billie Holiday and Josh White. Canada Lee became increasingly involved with the series, serving as narrator and also acting in many of the dramatic productions. One February 1945 show offered a tribute to Lee, also broadcast on the Mutual network nationally, to honor his Broadway success as Bigger Thomas in the play adapted from Richard Wright's 1940 novel *Native Son*. The tribute was hosted by Paul Robeson, who sang a song protesting Jim Crow (which he said he had written "in the spirit of *Native Son*"), and it also presented a comedy skit by singer-actress Hattie McDaniel and comic actor Eddie Anderson, a live tap dancing performance by Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, musical performances by Duke Ellington and W. C. Handy, a telegram from Joe Louis, on-air congratulations from Richard Wright, and a performance from the play.

Other *New World* shows used the newsmagazine/documentary drama format to protest the demeaning obstacles facing African-American performers ("Negroes in the Entertainment Industry"); challenge housing discrimination in war industry cities ("Hot Spots USA"); and call attention to the link between national and international patterns of discrimination ("Apartheid in South Africa"). As on *The March of Time*, historical events were restaged dramatically, sometimes including key participants themselves; for example, Adam Clayton Powell played himself as a minister on a program called "The Vermont Experiment," showcasing a church project that arranged summer visits from black Harlem youths to white farm families in Vermont.

Obstacles to racial equality provided the climax for original drama written for the show. Roi Ottley's own script, "The Negro Domestic," was meant to challenge white fantasies of "the Mammy legend"; as Ottley wrote in the narration, "Yes, it is true that Mammy doesn't live here anymore." In the play, a black domestic worker's son, serving in the armed forces and training to be a pilot, challenged the white employer family's confidence in segregation. The maid found the family's attempted defense of racial separation so insulting that she quit to work in a war factory. Dramatic adaptations of fiction also appeared, including one based on the writer Dorothy Parker's late-1920s short-story critique of white misconceptions about black culture, "Arrangements in Black and White," and a two-part version of radical Howard Fast's novel of the embattled African-American achievements of Reconstruction, *Freedom Road* (1944).³¹

New World A-Coming was exceptional, but it was not alone. In Chicago, progressive activist and journalist Richard Durham was also involved in efforts to challenge the whiteness of radio's customary address and, in doing so, to expand African-American citizenship claims. He wrote profiles of famous African Americans for a weekly drama series, *Democracy USA*, locally broadcast from 1946 to 1948 and partially supported by the *Chicago Defender*. He created a

pioneering soap opera about a black family, *Here Comes Tomorrow*, set on Chicago's South Side, broadcast locally in 1946. His name is most often associated with the original and inventive black history radio dramas he wrote for *Destination Freedom*, on the air in Chicago from 1948 to 1950.³² *New World A-Coming* and *Destination Freedom* provide extraordinarily rich and creative examples of radio's potential for new forms of progressive political address that expanded the understanding of democratic citizenship as multiracial.

After Pearl Harbor, Paul Robeson got invitations to appear on radio not as an entertainer but as a representative citizen-statesman. His radio access had already begun to expand after his success with "Ballad for Americans" on CBS. He was the featured vocalist on another CBS music show, *Kraft Musical Theater*; in 1940 he served as the producer and host of *Five Songs for Democracy*, a program of Spanish songs performed in tribute to the International Brigades who fought on the Loyalist side in the Spanish Civil War; and he rebroadcast "Ballad for Americans" as part of a CBS special called *All God's Children*. But during the war Robeson became a featured spokesperson, making nationally broadcast speeches combining support for the war as a war against nazism with clear demands for racial equality at the Labor for Victory rally, at a *Herald Tribune* forum in 1943, on a special program commemorating Lincoln's birthday in 1944, and at a celebration for the opening of the United Nations in April 1945.³³

The progressive access to radio that had expanded dramatically during the war narrowed just as dramatically in years afterward. Noncommercial programming, those slots that had been most available to progressives, shrank as network executives raided radio to support the development of television and competition for advertising intensified. The antifascist ideological formulations that connected support for labor, civil rights, and internationalism, and which had suffused the prewar and wartime Cultural Front synthesis, were increasingly challenged by new Cold War realignments and attacked by reenergized conservatives.

The process by which wartime's common sense became postwar heresy took several years. Norman Corwin, so identified with momentous wartime broadcasting, having been commissioned to write the national broadcasts to mark the ending of the war on V-E Day, *On a Note of Triumph*, and V-J Day, *14 August*, was forced out of CBS by mid-1948, although he worked for UN radio until the early 1950s.³⁴ Robeson appeared on radio broadcasts on behalf of Henry Wallace and the Progressive Citizens of America during the 1948 campaign. The Committee for the Negro in the Arts, a loose coalition of African-American activists in the entertainment industries based in New York, called a conference to keep pressure on the industry for nonstereotypical representations and more employment in broadcasting for Negroes in the summer of 1949.³⁵

But at the same moment the apparatus for blacklisting was taking shape, assisted by the emergence of "professional" blacklisters, such as the three ex-FBI agents who set up American Business Consultants in 1946 to collect and dis-

seminate lists of "subversives," publishing a newsletter, *Counterattack*, with a special radio issue, and a full-length book, *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*, in June 1950. Accounts of named "Communist sympathizers and fellow travelers," such as those read from FBI files at Judith Coplon's espionage trial, were published in the *New York Times* in the summer of 1949. These lists provided ammunition for local and national conservative groups to mobilize pressure on networks and corporate sponsors.³⁶ In December 1949 Richard Durham wrote to his friend Langston Hughes that the pressures of censorship were mounting (In March 1950 Robeson was invited to appear on Eleanor Roosevelt's Sunday afternoon television show to participate in a debate on "the role of the Negro in American life," but within twenty-four hours of the show's announcement, a storm of opposition orchestrated by the American Legion and the Catholic War Veterans pressured NBC to cancel Robeson's appearance and to promise that Robeson would never appear on NBC, making him the first American to be officially banned from television.) By August 1950 Durham's version of *Destination Freedom* was canceled.³⁷ Durham was not personally named in *Red Channels*, but most of the radio progressives discussed above were included in what Barnouw later termed "a roll of honor."³⁸

At the time, the powerful impact of the listings to discredit what had seemed to best express the spirit of American democracy in the war years and to make illegitimate that which had been so widely acclaimed was deeply shocking. As Arthur Miller commented retrospectively, "In 1946 I do not think we could have believed that such a black list was possible, that the current of one's life and career could simply be switched off and the wires left dead" (269).

Although malicious, incomplete, and arbitrary, listing "Reds" in broadcasting could have an explosive impact precisely because those names were synonymous with such widely known and broadly admired work in broadcasting, an ironic testimony to the expanded cultural authority gained by the left through its presence on radio in this period.

Notes

1. For further discussion of Mary Margaret McBride, major radio personality and host of an extremely popular daytime radio "magazine format" show on the air from 1934 into the 1950s, combining serious content for women with personal commercial endorsements, see Hilmes 277-87.

2. This incident was discussed by Barnouw, *History* 51-52.

3. On unions' lack of access to national network time, see Barnouw, *Radio* 80. Goldberg's comment appeared in Freedman 360, but her 1956 comments may have been strategically aimed at distancing herself from any association with the left, especially after the *Red Channels* attack on her television costar Philip Loeb forced him off her show. See Donald Weber's discussion of this incident (144-67).

4. Radio's whiteness has been commented upon by Hilmes 75-96; Barnouw, *History* 110-11; MacDonald *Don't Touch That Dial!* 327-70; Barlow, "Commercial" 175-89, *Voice Over* 1-46. The minstrelsy straitjacket was exemplified in shows such as *Plantation Nights*, a variety

show broadcast on KFI in Los Angeles in 1932, where African Americans were cast as slaves singing, dancing, and joking for "Massa" and "Missus." Radio's showcasing black performers via a plantation setup paralleled the Hollywood production of "southerns" in the same period, analyzed by Rogin 159–208.

5. These incidents are discussed in Barlow, "Commercial" 186–87.

6. Early dramatic alternatives to minstrelsy on radio are discussed in Barnouw, *History* 110–11; Barlow, "Commercial" 184–85, 187–89; MacDonald, *Don't Touch That Dial!* 332, 329–40. According to Houseman, Carlton Moss was born in Newark around 1910; he grew up in Newark and in North Carolina. He directed a community project for the New York Public Library before he began to write for the radio, conceiving and writing three series for NBC (91). In the late 1930s Moss wrote for the Negro unit in the New York Federal Writers' Project. See also Mangione 262; "Carlton." Hernandez was born in Puerto Rico and grew up in Rio de Janeiro, entering show business in the United States through minstrelsy, circus, and vaudeville performance.

7. Denning develops these linkages while also identifying four distinct radical theater formations in the 1930s: the Group Theatre, the FTP's Living Newspaper, the actors and writers trying to create an independent black theater in Harlem, and Welles's and Houseman's Mercury group (365–72).

8. Laura Mulvey calls attention to *The March of Time's* distinctive style (35–37). Orson Welles had developed his own dramatic range and resonance in "performing" the news on *The March of Time*, where he appeared frequently between 1935 and 1939.

9. CBS, behind NBC, and with 77% of its schedule unsold in 1933, was particularly active in developing quality programming on unsponsored airtime as a competitive strategy; see Barnouw, *History* 55–63.

10. Both Reis and Herrmann would eventually work in film. In addition to his work for *Columbia Workshop*, Reis wrote, directed, and produced many radio dramas (Ephraim Katz in *The Film Encyclopedia* credits him with giving Orson Welles his first radio job). Reis became a screenwriter for Paramount in 1938 and then moved to RKO to direct his first film in 1940. His screen credits included the film version of Arthur Miller's acclaimed and prize-winning play *All My Sons* in 1948. Herrmann went to work for CBS radio as a composer-conductor in 1934 and began scoring films in 1941 with his work for Orson Welles in *Citizen Kane*.

11. No African American was featured until a 1948 broadcast profiled Booker T. Washington.

12. Wishengrad was initially rejected as ineligible for the DuPont account because his name so publicly identified him as Jewish, but eventually he did write for the show. In addition to *Cavalcade*, Wishengrad wrote for an NBC program, *Lands of the Free*, and for *Words at War*.

13. Another *Cavalcade* story assigned to Miller concerned two miners who discovered iron ore on the Mesabi Range and planned to mine it themselves and give the proceeds to the poor and to the Indians who led them to the spot. Their lack of success at holding on to their legal claim against pressure to sell from John D. Rockefeller seemed to Miller "the most brutally rapacious corporate tale," but the DuPont executives saw it as an example of Rockefeller's foresight, enterprise, and efficiency (Miller 206–8). Orson Welles also read two other *Cavalcade* scripts, one of which he also helped to write; "The Great Man Votes," 15 Dec. 1941, and "Admiral of the Ocean Sea," 12 Oct. 1942, on Columbus. The Columbus broadcast included quotations from Walt Whitman and a message from Henry Wallace, and it was broadcast to Latin America by the Coordinator of Inter-American affairs; the script is reprinted in Barnouw, *Radio*. Welles's *Cavalcade* appearances are catalogued in Museum of Broadcasting 67.

14. The CBS announcement signaled its didactic entertainment goals with its announcement of the program, which read in part: "PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS will not deal with war or with issues growing out of the war which divide our minds. Instead these new programs . . . will . . . bring us reminders that we Americans still enjoy our constitutional rights to life, liberty, and the PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS." Cited in Bannerman 47.

15. John LaTouche was a left-wing poet who would later write the lyrics for *Cabin in the Sky* (1943). Earl Robinson was a Seattle-born composer who had graduated from college in 1933, moved to New York City, and joined the Communist Party. He was the musical director of the Workers' Theater, which had been absorbed into the FTP in 1935. The song was originally titled "Ballad for Uncle Sam" for the revue *Sing for Your Supper*. Bannerman notes that Robinson revised the song slightly for radio according to Norman Corwin's suggestions (48–49).

16. See MacDonald, *Don't Touch That Dial!* 346–47; Barlow, "Commercial" 18–19; Denning 115–59; Savage 61–62; Barlow, *Voice Over* 59–66.

17. Robeson's rendition elicited a prolonged and tumultuous standing ovation from the six hundred people in the studio audience. According to Robeson's biographer, the studio audience stamped, shouted, and bravoed for two minutes while the show was still on the air, and for fifteen minutes after. The studio switchboard was jammed with calls for two more hours, and within the next few days, swamped with mail about the performance. Robeson repeated the broadcast on New Year's Day and sang it again on CBS radio in August 1940 in a special broadcast called *All God's Children*. Robeson's special recording of the song for Victor Records went to the top of the hit charts, and the song was popularly reprised numerous times, including, by the Republican National Convention in 1940 with orchestration by the Philadelphia orchestra and by a group of Boy Scouts in Gimbel's department store. *Time* reported on 8 July 1940 that Robeson's recording of "Ballad" was the popular number most in demand at the RCA exhibit at the New York City World's Fair. 8 July 1940 Duberman 236–37, see also Barnouw, *History*, 647.

18. Corwin's memo is cited by Bannerman 50.

19. Denning called attention to Lomax's career on the radio (91). Eisenschitz interviewed Lomax: "I thought this was a joke. I didn't know anybody could be seriously interested in working on the radio, a pile of crap. Then I heard Corwin's broadcasts and I did a flip, I realized that radio was a great art of the time, there was a way to do it quick and straight and with a few sounds you could evoke" (Denning 52). Starting in 1941 Lomax was part of a group, including Joseph Liss, gathering documentary material about life in the United States, for an experimental radio series using people, not actors, to tell their stories; see Barnouw, *Radio* 49.

20. Evidence of the *Americans All . . . Immigrants All* approach may be found in a listeners' handbook written by J. Morris Jones in 1939. See also Savage's analysis of the series, (21–62) and her discussion of *Freedom's People* (63–105).

21. *Variety* 17 Dec. 1941: 44 (qtd. in Bannerman 87–88). Work by Benét, Corwin, and Sandburg appeared on *Columbia Workshop* between 1939 and 1941; work by Sherwood appeared on *Pursuit of Happiness* in 1939; an adaptation of Capra's film *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* was on *Mercury Theatre's Campbell Playhouse* in 1940. Bannerman discusses the history of the *To Secure These Truths* broadcast (73–88); see also Barnouw, *History* 150–54.

22. Barnouw discusses the Dies committee investigation of broadcasting from the early 1940s through 1947 (*History* 174–78). The film industry presented a strong and united defense; the MPAA hired Wendell Willkie to represent the industry, and he was joined by Harry Warner and Darryl Zanuck in making a case for Hollywood's anti-Nazi stance, according to Doherty (40) and Hilmes (246–50).

23. Although Benét died in March 1943, his radio plays were published in 1945, with a foreword written by Norman Rosten. *They Burned the Book* was distributed free by the Writers' War Board to hundreds of groups for local broadcasts, it was also used in schools, and in army camps as part of orientation.

24. Hilmes argues that radio played a crucial role in circulating representations that made use of antifascism to attack racism, and in proposing new depictions of black and ethnic characters to coexist with, and even challenge, its dominant modes of characterization (250–59).

25. Barnouw, *History* 196. The script *Japanese-Americans* was reprinted in Barnouw, *Radio* 221–37. It was written by Harry Kleiner, who was inspired by *Columbia Workshop* to write his

own weekly experimental drama series for a local station in Philadelphia when he was a college student at Temple University and at Yale Drama School. Wishengrad's name was associated with two other radio plays: *The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto*, a prize-winning play about Jewish resistance to the Nazis (broadcast for the American Jewish Committee on the eve of Yom Kippur on NBC in 1943, repeated twice due to popular demand, chosen by Writer's War Board as war script of the month, and sent overseas on transcription), and *To the American People*, Wishengrad's 1945 radio dramatization of Jewish refugees displaced from their homes in Europe (narrated by Paul Muni and performed by former Group Theatre actors Morris Carnovsky and Ruth Nelson on 5 July 1945 on ABC, included in *Best One Act Plays of 1945*). Rosten's prize-winning radio play was *Concerning the Red Army*, dramatizing the heroism of the Red Army's stand against Nazi forces, written in association with Russian War Relief; it was aired in a special broadcast commemorating the twenty-sixth anniversary of the establishment of the Red Army, on CBS on 22 Feb. 1944. It was directed by Norman Corwin, the music was written by Bernard Herrmann, and actors included Hester Sondergaard and Will Geer. It was distributed to educational groups by the War Writers Board and was included in *Best One Act Plays of 1944*.

26. In 1946 Perl was asked by CBS to prepare a docudrama about the hangings of the Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg, to be broadcast in prime time on the day these occurred, 16 Oct. 1946. His play, *The Empty Noose*, ended by stressing the links between the thinking of the war criminals and what he called the "seeds of fascism" in the United States: calling a union man a Red as a way to smash his union; the blinding of Isaac Woodward, a black vet in the South; throwing bricks through a synagogue window at services and painting "Kill the kikes" on the sidewalks outside. See Liss 122, 130–31. Perl's later work would include the 1953 Broadway production *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, writing for the 1963 television show *East Side West Side* coscreenwriter credit with Ossie Davis for *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (based on Chester Himes's black detectives, directed by Ossie Davis [1970]), a 1972 documentary about Malcolm X, and a screenplay for a film version of Malcolm X's life, which would receive credit as the partial basis for Spike Lee's 1992 film.

27. The Army Air Force Radio unit that produced *First in the Air* included the former Group Theater actor Corporal Martin Ritt, and some of the music was written by Sergeant Elmer Bernstein. Ritt would later direct theater, moving to direct and act in live drama on television from 1948 to 1951, when he was blacklisted. He managed to support himself with stage work and by teaching acting until he was offered films to direct after 1956. After the war, Bernstein scored music for some UN radio programs, and then for movies beginning in 1951.

28. On radio, Lincoln's words were read by Raymond Massey; the speaking narrator was Earl Robinson, and the singing narrator was Burl Ives. *Lonesome Train* was reprinted by Barnouw (*Radio*). See also "Millard Lampell" in Buhle and McGilligan 388–403.

29. This was the same station that had broadcast the 1935 black serial drama *A Harlem Family*, written by black writers and acted by black actors, sponsored by the Adult Education Project of the New York City Board of Education; see MacDonald, *Don't Touch That Dial!* 332; Barlow "Commercial" 188; *Voice Over* 78–83.

30. Ottley, born in Harlem, attended New York City public schools and studied at St. Bonaventure College in 1926–1927 and at the University of Michigan in 1928–1929. Back in New York he worked as a redcap, bellhop, and soda jerker before finding a job as a reporter in 1930 and then becoming a columnist and editor on the *Amsterdam Star News*. During these years he also studied at Columbia (1934–35) and New York University (1935–36), and he studied law at St. John's University Law School in Brooklyn. In February 1936 Ottley joined with Harlem leaders A. Philip Randolph, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., and members of the Harlem Communist Party to form the National Negro Congress, determined to play a role in mobilizing broad public support for the industrial union movement, an end to discrimination in the workplace and in public life, unemployment relief, and the abolition of lynching and police brutality. (By 1939 Randolph and Powell had left the NNC.) Ottley worked for the Federal Writers' Project in New York, supervising the Negro unit until he was dismissed with the cutoff

of federal sponsorship in 1939. During the war Ottley did public relations work for the CIO, especially for the National CIO War Relief Committee. The success of the book encouraged its publishers to join with the Rosenwald Foundation to sponsor a trip overseas for Ottley, in order to gather material for a book about all "the colored peoples who are fighting on the world's battlegrounds." Ottley was also invited to work as a war correspondent overseas for Bernarr MacFadden's *Liberty Magazine*. According to his 1945 entry in *Current Biography*, he was the first African-American correspondent for a national publication (566-67).

31. Ottley's script was reprinted in Barnouw, *Radio* 354-68. Analysis of this appears in Barlow, "Commercial" 196-201, *Voice Over* 78-83, Savage 247-60.

32. Durham was born in Raymond, Mississippi, in 1917, and moved to the south side of Chicago with his family in the early 1920s. In the late 1930s and early 1940s he worked as a dramatist for the Chicago Writer's project branch of the Federal WPA, participated in the Southside Writer's Group, and took part in the W. E. B. Du Bois Theater Guild, with fellow actors Oscar Brown Jr. and Studs Terkel. He worked for the *Chicago Defender* from 1942 to 1945. His *Destination Freedom* scripts were collected by J. Fred MacDonald (Richard Durham's). His work in radio is discussed also by Barlow, *Voice Over* 83-89, and Savage (260-70).

33. Robeson's expanded access to radio in wartime is noted by Duberman (254-56, 267) and Barlow (*Voice Over* 61-63).

34. Corwin was told that the network had to support programming that was more commercially remunerative. Corwin discussed his departure from CBS in a 1994 oral history (Directors Guild 87-94, 113-34); see also Bannerman 198-205.

35. The Committee for the Negro in the Arts was chaired by Ernest Crichlow; Canada Lee, Shirley Graham, and Fredi Washington were also active in the organization. *Variety* reported that the 6 July 1949 conference was attended by "300 radio and TV writers, actors, directors, representatives of unions, and colored organizations." Canada Lee's keynote address criticized radio's caricatures ("With rare exceptions, Negroes are portrayed as giggling maids, Rochesters, Aunt Jemimas, and shiftless lazy individuals"), the news broadcasts as "news of the white world," and drama as "a pure Lily white drama in which almost never does a Negro enter the story." Lee pleaded not for the promotion of "tolerance" but for black stories: "A virtual Iron Curtain exists against the entire Negro people as far as radio is concerned." Peter Lyons, speaking as a council member of the Radio Writers Guild, pushed the broadcast unions as the best ways to increase Negro employment on the radio. "Negro" 35.

36. See Schrecker for a full account of the apparatus of blacklisting in broadcasting and other industries.

37. For analysis of the censorship of Durham and Robeson, see MacDonald, *Richard Durham's*; Savage 268-69; Barlow, *Voice Over* 63-65; Duberman 384-85.

38. Individuals identified with the kind of radio work discussed in this article, which was only a partial discussion of one category of progressive work on the radio, constituted 23 of *Red Channel's* arbitrary list of 151; Himan Brown, Norman Corwin, Will Geer, Lena Horne, Langston Hughes, Burl Ives, Millard Lampell, John LaTouche, Alan Lomax, Joseph Losey, Peter Lyon, Burgess Meredith, Arthur Miller, Dorothy Parker, Arnold Perl, Paul Robeson, Earl Robinson, Harold Rome, Norman Rosten, Hazel Scott, Pete Seeger, Hester Sondergaard, Orson Welles, and Josh White.

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CHAPTER II**RADIO AND THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF
RACIAL EQUALITY**

Barbara Savage

POPULAR NATIONAL POLITICAL FORUMS were among radio's most prominent features of the World War II era and one of its many gifts to television. All the networks had some version of this public affairs format, and of these, *America's Town Meeting of the Air* was one of the most popular, the most respected, and the most influential.¹ Because of its continuity, this show is a particularly valuable site for observing how over the course of a decade the political subject of race, first deemed unspeakable, came to be aired and then rose to prominence as a national issue. These broadcasts chart the evolution of a permissible political discourse about racial oppression, a development that provides insights into the fashioning and limitations of white liberal response to the emergence of the civil rights movement.

African Americans waged a mind war against the shameful paradox of a segregated democracy during this period, although it would take two decades of mass protests, litigation, and deaths to overcome virulent white resistance to dismantling its edifice. On the rhetorical level, the discourse of racial equality was challenged by a discourse of white resistance, a fight played out with a national listening audience. The concerted assault by African Americans upon the conceptual world of racial segregation and the airing of a new political narrative on race has been overshadowed by their legacy, the dramatic battles and victories of the 1950s and 1960s that would be carried not on radio but on television.

Airing the Race Problem

America's Town Meeting of the Air, a New York–based town-hall-style political discussion program, was a lively and entertaining approach to public affairs discussions. A descendent of the suffragist-founded League for Political Education, the Town Hall discussion meetings originated in 1921 and were taken to radio in 1935. Hosted by George Denny, a former drama teacher and professional actor, Town Meeting was intended to be a nationwide version of the old New England town meeting. Guests on the show debated opposing views on controversial issues in front of audiences of over a thousand people, who were allowed to ask questions of the panelists.

Listeners could request or subscribe to weekly transcriptions for the program, which *Town Meeting* used in an aggressive public outreach campaign, actively promoting the use of its broadcasts and transcriptions in schools and the hundreds of listening and discussion clubs that formed around the show's weekly broadcasts. The show also took to the road for half of the year, broadcasting live from cities around the nation.

Figuring out how to openly confront the race issue as a political question was a puzzle for *Town Meeting*, as it was for other radio panel discussion shows in this period.² *Town Meeting's* initial foray into the question of race relied on the tactic of exploring a seemingly neutral subject, even though it was set in daring symbolic space. In May 1942 *Town Meeting* aired a show from the chapel of the premier black academic institution of its day, Howard University. The show's guests were all black Howard faculty members—philosopher Alain Locke; Howard's president Mordecai Johnson; Leon Ransom, dean of the law school; and Doxey Wilkerson, professor of education. In introducing these representatives of black intelligentsia, Denny hastened to emphasize that though the panelists were all African Americans, they had been asked to deal not with the “race problem” but with a broader philosophical question, reflected in the show's title: “Is There a Basis for Spiritual Unity in the World Today.” Despite the designated topic, to those eager to hear the race question aired, the site selection alone served as clue and cue enough, as it did for the panelists.³

Locke and his colleagues took the show's title as an opportunity not only to discuss the philosophy of religion, which they did with vigor, but to portray racism as an international ethical problem. Locke, for example, characterized as “poor seedbeds for world unity and world order” what he called the “superciliously self-appointed superior races aspiring to impose their preferred culture, self-righteous creeds and religions expounding monopolies on ways of life and salvation.” Doxey Wilkerson was even more blunt, noting that “in this war in which colonial people play such an important role, the traditional relations of master and subject peoples are being altered. The chain of imperialist slavery tends definitely to weaken.” Taking the point further, Ransom asked, “[Y]et have

we, Negroes and whites in this country, for instance, achieved any sort of spiritual unity? Are we not still enslaved by the idea that one must be dominant and the other the subservient group?"⁴

The audience's questions generated responses from the panelists that were more wide ranging than the initial discussion. One questioner asked, "[D]o you agree that the Negro has made his progress in America because of cooperation rather than through his opposed strategies?" Leon Ransom's response drew hearty applause: "[B]eing a realist, I am afraid that I must say that the Negro has made his progress in America *in spite* of the majority group."⁵

The broadcast from Howard put African-American intellectuals on display, where they embraced a cultural and political role—and not just through the logic of their arguments, for they reinforced their claims by their own aural presence as articulate, thoughtful representatives of the race. Operating in an educational forum, they could engage in a relatively free and protected political discourse. One paradoxical effect of the broadcast from Howard was that the subject of race was being discussed by a group of blacks, but the discussion was broadcast to an integrated but largely white radio listening audience. Arguments about race were being made via radio, but with no room for interracial dialogue or dialectic. At that point, for *Town Meeting* the subject still remained too volatile to be discussed more directly or by a mixed-race panel.

This would change with the escalation of the war, rising domestic racial tensions, especially race riots in the summer of 1943, and growing political attention to African Americans and race relations in general. These factors finally drove *Town Meeting* to abandon some of its caution in approaching the race issue. Departing from its usual practice of presenting the week's debate topic in the form of a question, *Town Meeting* aired a show from New York in early 1944 with the imperative title "Let's Face the Race Question." The moderator, George Denny, opened the broadcast by warning, "Tonight we're going to discuss a question that is considered by some timid souls to be dangerous—the race question, more specifically, the Negro question." Adding to the air of danger, Denny took the very unusual cautionary step of asking the audience "to refrain from applause or demonstrations of any kind during the program."⁶

Special care had also been taken to balance the presentation and debate. The show's panelists were the well-known African-American poet and writer Langston Hughes; Carey McWilliams, an effective white progressive radio presence throughout the decade; journalist John Temple Graves, representing a white southern point of view, and James Shepard, the president of North Carolina College for Negroes, who expressed a more conservative black southern stance.

The somewhat informal and freewheeling atmosphere of *Town Meeting* permitted Langston Hughes to launch a frontal attack on the race problem unlike anything heard on national radio before. Hughes accused the country of under-

mining “the morale of Negro soldiers by segregating them in our armed forces and by continuing to Jim Crow them and their civilian brothers in public places.” Hughes blasted opposition to social equality as a smoke screen for a profound fear of intermarriage, “as if permitting Negroes to vote in the poll-tax states would immediately cause Whites and Negroes to rush to the altar.” That conception of equality, he concluded, had “nothing to do with the broad problem of civil, legal, labor, and suffrage rights for all Americans.” What was needed was an “over-all federal program protecting the rights of all minorities and educating all Americans to that effect.”⁷

John Temple Graves began his rebuttal to Hughes’s performance with some drama of his own, silencing the audience to offer a prayer “that nothing tonight will increase the sum total of race hate in America.” Graves argued that states should be left alone to deal with the race problem because “not all the laws this nation can pass, not all the excitement this Nation’s race leaders can create, not all the federal bureaus laid end to end, can force 30 million white people in the South to do what they are passionately and deeply resolved to do in race relationships.”⁸

The broadcast generated a very high volume of letters and would remain among *Town Meeting’s* most popular shows ever by that measure. The staff seemed relieved that there were so few negative responses to the program, credit for that rested with McWilliams and with Hughes, both of whom had amicable styles which softened the political meanings of their arguments for some white listeners. After all, radio listeners heard tone as well as content in these discussions, and one could override the other. Hughes and McWilliams both managed to project a nonthreatening tone even as they made fairly radical arguments in substance. Indeed, most listeners complimented the show for a fair discussion and for one lacking in bitterness.⁹

Langston Hughes’s appearance sparked an outpouring of personal support to him from many listeners who valued his message and his tone. They wrote him directly rather than through the network to thank him and to commend his political courage.¹⁰ Perhaps the letter that best captured the meaning of the broadcast for many black listeners came from a group of students at Spelman College: “Thousands and thousands of thanks. . . . As all of us students . . . huddled around the radio in our various dormitories here on campus tonight, we rallied and cheered you as you so frankly and beautifully spoke the truth on the ‘race question.’”¹¹ The managing editor of a black newspaper wrote him that “you did a swell job and I just wanted you to know that we out here in the Middle West enjoyed it very much.” She also asked the question that may have been on many minds: “What percentage of the audience was colored and how many of those who asked questions were colored? We couldn’t tell over the air.”¹² Several white listeners also commended Hughes, with one thanking him for his “fine contribution towards a better understanding of one of America’s greatest problems.”¹³

Langston Hughes knew the power of radio and had repeatedly sought access to it, with much disappointment. He had written poems and dramatic plays for radio, but as a black writer, he had faced difficulties getting his work aired. Indeed, in a 1943 *Chicago Defender* column, Hughes wrote a letter to "Southern White Folks" in which he subverted the usual "Negro problem" imagery to make a point about radio's refusal to broadcast more of his work:

I tell you, you are really a problem to me. I, as a writer, might have had many scripts performed on the radio if it were not for you. The radio stations look at a script about Negro life that I write and tell me, "Well, you see, our programs are heard down South, and the South might not like this." You keep big Negro stars like Ethel Waters and Duke Ellington off commercial programs, because the sponsors are afraid the South might not buy their products if Negro artists appear regularly on their series.¹⁴

Hughes recognized that the imagined southern listener was not the only reason or perhaps even the real reason that radio executives were so reluctant to air more serious programming about race. Several months after his *Defender* column, Hughes observed that during the war radio had become "fairly receptive" to presenting material about the "positive achievement" of particular African Americans, such as George Washington Carver and the navy hero Dorrie Miller, but was still unwilling to air anything "setting forth the difficulties of the Jim Crow military set-up, segregation in war industries, etc., and what people of good will can do about it." The fact that radio had "censored out any real dramatic approach to the actual problems of the Negro people" rendered the radio industry "almost as bad as Hollywood." African Americans, he wrote, continued to hold a deep disdain for radio's presentation of what he called "'handkerchief head' sketches," in which black stars usually were featured.¹⁵

Hughes's experience with the power of radio's reach only fed his anger and disappointment over radio's failures on the race issue. "Considering the seriousness of the race problem in our country," he wrote a year later, in 1945, "I do not feel that radio is serving the public interest in that regard very well. And it continues to keep alive the stereotype of the dialect-speaking amiably-moronic Negro servant as the chief representative of our racial group on the air." Recounting that "liberal" network executives lacked the political resolve to air a dramatic series about African Americans which he had repeatedly proposed to them, Hughes concluded: "I DO NOT LIKE RADIO, and I feel that it is almost as far from being a free medium of expression for Negro writers as Hitler's air-lanes are for the Jews."¹⁶

Despite Hughes's continued disappointment in radio's treatment of the race issues, his appearance on the *Town Meeting* broadcast had brought listeners face to face with the race question. The scarcity of listener protest eased the way

for *Town Meeting* to tackle the more difficult discussion of what to do about racial inequality. A discussion of the provocative question “Should government guarantee job equality for all races?” was aired in reaction to the ongoing campaign to make the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) a permanent agency.¹⁷

What remains most remarkable about this debate in 1944 is the fact that point for point, the arguments made against a government role in helping African Americans obtain fair access to employment were exactly the same as those directed at federal affirmative action programs decades later. Opponents blamed affirmative intervention for creating the very bitterness and racial hatred that mandated the measures in the first place—as if race prejudice, discrimination, and segregation had no prior independent or enduring existence. For example, one panelist claimed to support equal opportunity in principle, yet he opposed any federal role in furthering it because it will “stir up race consciousness, bitterness, and intolerance.” Another speaker made a related argument that passage of a bill establishing a permanent FEPC would prevent African Americans from following the hard route of the traditional immigrant path to success and therefore “will breed bitterness and racial hatred.”¹⁸

This show, broadcast at the end of 1944, captured well public disagreement about the role the federal government should play in protecting and furthering the access of black people to employment.¹⁹ Once again *Town Meeting* staff were surprised by the degree to which this discussion led many white listeners to write long personal “dissertations on their personal feelings about the Negro question,” deeply held “emotional reactions” that far exceeded the specific issue of employment.²⁰

Having faced one aspect of racial discrimination, *Town Meeting* turned to the broader question of racial injustice in a May 1945 broadcast that asked, “Are we solving America’s race problem?” This topic generated passionate expressions of white resistance to the very idea of raising the question for public discussion. Indeed, this would be one of *Town Meeting*’s most controversial and tumultuous broadcasts. The mere announcement of the topic drew letters of protest from white listeners, even before the show was aired. Many of these fear-filled letters came from outside the South, evidence in part of the role that wartime migrations of African Americans had nationalized the race problem in many whites’ minds. These fears may have been amplified in this period following Franklin Roosevelt’s death and the growing anticipation that the war would soon end, although that was not given direct voice in the letters. Several writers warned that it was dangerous to raise the question at all, fearing that the show was “playing with dynamite” and only encouraging more racial strife.²¹

Some listeners earnestly suggested remedies to the race problem, including the oft-repeated idea that all blacks be relocated into reservations or into separate regions or cities or whole southern states of their own; one writer suggested that the government create separate states for blacks “in the same spirit as

Zionism.”²² Another wanted blacks to have completely equal opportunities with whites in jobs, education, and housing provided that it could be done in a way to keep “ALL OF THOSE THINGS SEPARATE.”²³ The most colorful description of the race problem came from a man in Seattle who may have mixed his metaphors but who captured well the fears held to some degree by many writers from outside the South:

The Negro population, is like the Sahara Desert, advancing every year about a mile, with overwhelming and irresistible force. Only one thing can stop the Desert, by drowning or letting in the sea. . . . But you cannot drown America’s no. 1 problem, the negro. We are saturated with an incurable cancer. It has been allowed to go on so long, to operate now is impossible.²⁴

When the show was aired, these prebroadcast responses prompted the moderator, Denny, to spread the responsibility for the choice of the topic, reminding his listeners that their votes and letters “had put this subject near the top of the list of America’s major domestic problems.”²⁵ Richard Wright, one of the country’s most powerful black writers, and Elmer Carter, the black former editor of the National Urban League’s *Opportunity* magazine, took opposing points of view on whether the race problem was being solved. Carter was paired with Irving Ives, the majority leader of the New York State Assembly; on Wright’s side was liberal congressman Jerry Voorhis from California.²⁶ Carter offered the more conservative black position that the country was making progress toward racial equality.²⁷

In sharp contrast to Carter’s voice of moderation, Wright unleashed an aggressive and unrelenting attack on racism and its effects, exceeding the bounds of politically acceptable discourse much further than had Langston Hughes the year before. Wright’s extraordinary use of language not only overpowered Carter’s arguments but allowed him to dominate this program in a way that was utterly beyond the moderator’s ability to control. Wright essentially reframed the entire debate and took the show over by asking:

What do we mean by a solution of the race problem? It means a nation in which there will exist no residential segregation, no Jim Crow Army, no Jim Crow Navy, no Jim Crow Red Cross Blood Bank, no Negro institutions, no laws prohibiting intermarriage, no customs assigning Negroes to inferior positions. . . . Racial segregation is our national policy, a part of our culture, tradition, and morality. . . . We see reflections of it in our films and hear it over our radios. . . . Gradual solutions are out of date. . . . Here is the truth, whites can no longer regard Negroes as a passive, obedient minority. Whether we have a violent or peaceful solution of this problem depends upon the

degree to which white Americans can purge their minds of the illusions that they own and know Negroes.²⁸

Taking his argument a step further, Wright told his listeners that the “Negro has a sacred obligation and a moral duty to bring before the people of this country again and again and again the meaning of his problem,” but he added, “the fundamental problem rests upon whites and I believe that Negro protests, Negro agitation, should increase and become intense.”²⁹ In replying to a question about intermarriage prohibitions, Wright insisted that such laws should be abandoned, as they were already meaningless: “I was down in Mississippi in 1940 and I saw the streets thronged with Mulattoes in a state where you have an airtight anti intermarriage law.”³⁰

Wright’s call for black agitation and his comments on intermarriage jolted white listeners all over the country. Denny, who had been unable to harness Wright on the air, feared that such a response might ensue. In an unusual step, the day after the broadcast he asked for daily verbal reports on letters received rather than waiting for the normal weekly written tabulation and summary. His fears were well founded. Not only did the show generate an extraordinary volume of mail, but it drew long, passionate letters from the program’s well-educated white listeners, who heard Wright’s spirited advocacy as a threat to the racial world as they knew it, regardless of whether they lived in or outside of the South. Listeners, according to an internal report, were “highly critical of Richard Wright’s attitude” and had deplored the airing of the discussion of intermarriage.³¹

This was an understated summary of the audience’s reaction, as a closer look at a sample of the mail reveals. Furthermore, these letters demonstrate the levels to which white preoccupation with and fears about the race problem had risen nationwide by 1945. Again, this was a time when many whites were eager for normalcy after a war period marked both by southern black migration into areas previously without a visible black presence and by increasing expressions of black bitterness and anger, whether in city streets or under the sanction of radio forums such as *America’s Town Meeting*.

Wright’s remarks about intermarriage sparked outrage, especially among white women. One woman writer referred to the show as “revolting,” and another reported that she had been “appalled” by what she described as Wright’s demand for a “hybrid cesspool.”³² Other writers called Wright’s comments a “disgrace” and warned that they would lead to lynchings and encourage the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan.³³

Indeed, white women listeners who wrote in seemed most concerned about defending the honor of their husbands, brothers, and fathers. Moreover, these women did not oppose intermarriage as a way of defending themselves from imagined black suitors, as white men felt compelled to do on their behalf.

Rather, in criticizing Wright's accusation that mulattos were evidence of white male desire for black women, these white women also revealed their own deep fears of sexual competition from black females, which might be increased, they believed, if unions between white men and black women were sanctioned in law. In defense of white men, one writer from Detroit asserted that "I have never heard yet of a white man raping a colored woman."³⁴ White men, of course, also had been angered by Wright's comments, and their responses were even less polite. One particularly vehement writer from Houston accused all black men of wanting to rape white women and referred to Wright repeatedly as "that buck negro" or as "that ignorant negro buck."³⁵

Many listeners, such as those who wrote in even before the show aired, offered as a solution to the race problem that embodied the idea of sending blacks away or somehow physically roping the race off from whites. Some writers earnestly suggested that African Americans be granted a homeland in the United States, be given a portion of the Pacific Northwest to settle, or be returned to Africa. One anonymous writer thought that the only solution was to send all black Americans to Europe and to "exchange them for whites who would appreciate the advantage given them here, and eliminate these eternal race riots."³⁶ Many white people still searched for a solution to "the Negro problem" that would not upset their racial status quo; they simply wanted the problem to go away, as had whites who had embraced similar schemes throughout American history.

While some listeners offered solutions to the race problem, some writers eagerly denied that there was a problem. One writer from Chicago explained, without intended irony, that the only problem was that African Americans had been exposed to too much "propaganda employing such words as freedom and equality."³⁷ More predictably, some white southerners insisted that the problem was northern agitators themselves, or, as one writer dubbed them, "noisy mouthed reformers in the North" who were "broadcasting their views" and "trying to stir up unhappiness and discontent among our colored citizens."³⁸

Among the most interesting letters about the broadcast were those that revealed whites' anxieties that many blacks were no longer as deferential in their interactions with them as they used to be or as they ought to be. Some writers offered specific examples of increasing black arrogance and transgressions of racial etiquette, especially in southern border states and midwestern cities. One of the most telling letters came from a listener in Oklahoma who detailed what he called the "overbearing" ways in which blacks had begun to "push white people around." He complained that there was an "organized effort" among blacks "to make one day of the week a sort of 'push day,' on which the colored women of the town throng the places of business, and the sidewalks, just to shove white folks about." He warned that "once the war is over," blacks would be forced to "desist" from all such activities.³⁹ A writer from Chicago reported that he saw

blacks on streetcars and buses acting as if “they are better than the white”; another listener from Cincinnati complained of blacks’ new “overbearing attitude toward white people.”⁴⁰

These reactions by white Americans mirror descriptions of the everyday acts of resistance waged by black working-class men and women in crowded and contested public spaces and in other interactions with white people during this period. They also represent white fears about any acts that appeared to be out of line with white expectations of black positionality, as was apparent in the spate of rumors of organized black resistance. “Race rebels” such as Wright employed discursive and ideological tactics with the same effect in his intellectual encounters with white audiences.⁴¹ Wright’s argument on the broadcast served as further confirmation for whites that these acts of racial rebellion were not isolated but were likely to increase, and Wright himself provided another frightful personification of this change, all adding further fuel to white fears.

Many white listeners channeled their fury about Wright’s arguments into an attack on *Town Meeting* for allowing him to be on a “nation-wide radio hook-up,” permitting him such free rein of expression, and not having a southerner to defend the “white” point of view, or at least “some one well acquainted with the negro faults and shortcomings.”⁴² One California woman complained that “the white man’s mistreatment of the negro” was “not good material for radio comment,” chiding Wright for even mentioning intermarriage, which she thought only worked to close the minds of the “millions of people” who “were listening.”⁴³

One listener chastised Denny for his polite handling of Wright, saying: “He should have been cut off the air—with apology to the listening audience.”⁴⁴ Others held Denny personally complicit in Wright’s racial transgressions, specifically the fact that he referred to Wright as “MISTER.”⁴⁵ When an established radio forum lent its credibility, respect, and reach to black intellectuals such as Locke, Hughes, and now Wright, many white listeners deeply resented the division in white ranks that it represented and the breach in the sanctioned silence on racial inequalities that they desperately desired.

On the other hand, some listeners, mostly black, wrote in support of airing the issue in such a forthright manner, many by writing to Wright directly or through his publisher rather than through the network.⁴⁶ The president of a black women’s club in Mt. Vernon, New York, wrote to thank Wright: “I have never heard anything as well done as your expressions of last night at Town Hall. It was amazing and very much to the point.”⁴⁷ Among the most emphatic was a letter written directly to Wright on behalf of the black men assigned to the Army Air Forces 477th Bombardment Group, then stationed in Kentucky:

All radios of this group were tuned in on the program, so keen is the interest. Especially did we enjoy the way you handled the \$64 question.

It always comes up and we were glad to hear you handle it as you did. From all of us thanks a million. That personifies our outlook. We do not *ask* for democracy we *demand* it. In order to make democracy work it must work for all not just a few "Uncle Tom" leaders.⁴⁸

Other listeners also allied themselves with the thrust of Wright's overall arguments, often basing their arguments on contemporary examples. A black listener in Richmond asked: "[W]hy do Americans go 1,000 miles across the ocean to defend Democracy against the same evils as they are tolerating here upon our race?" The writer attached clippings about the police beating of a black soldier in Mississippi, inquiring, "[W]hy is it that the Secretary of War does not give our Negro in uniform the protection from white police officers and civilians wherever they may be?" Another particularly poignant letter asked, "How can we fight for the minorities abroad and keep our own in virtual slavery? If it is not corrected our boys will have died in vain." This writer recounted an incident in which Tuskegee airmen had been partitioned off by a screen before they were allowed to eat in a public space shared by whites.⁴⁹

Others who agreed with Wright made their case on moral grounds. "In every important event in our American History," another listener wrote, "the negro has been present, taking part regardless of danger for his white countryman and country—and you can't over look a people like that and still think you are right in doing so."⁵⁰ A few white listeners wrote in asking how they might support African Americans in their struggle for racial justice; one writer wanted to know what groups she could join to help, and another asked, "[W]hat is there that we can do?"⁵¹

Wright's controversial appearance on *America's Town Meeting* demonstrates once again the crucial cultural and political role African-American intellectuals played in this period. Wright, Alain Locke, and Langston Hughes used their limited guest privileges on these political discussion shows to advance political arguments too daring for most political figures to make, especially politicians who would have been featured on these national radio programs. They offered a new representation of African Americans and their abilities, arguing point for point with whites and sparring as equals in the arena of political debate. On a medium that was ideal for the skilled use of language and oratory, these accomplished African-American writers took on duty as public intellectuals, serving the race by fighting the battle of ideas that was essential to bringing shifts in public opinion.

These men and others argued eloquently for an end to discrimination and segregation, but that goal was still not even rhetorically acceptable to the majority of white Americans in 1945. For that majority, the solution was to simply send the problem away or to continue to cordon it off. Until that changed, there was little more that was politically safe to say. Silence on this issue of racial inequality set in at *America's Town Meeting of the Air*. This important national political

forum would confront the question, fashioning a remedy for racial discrimination and segregation only after the end of the war and after the insertion of a federal voice on the issue.

To Secure These Rights

The end of World War II brought with it an even bolder reassertion by African Americans that their claims for an end to racial inequalities were now more timely than ever and could no longer be excused or postponed by fears of disunity during the war crisis. Harry Truman's assumption of office in 1945 coincided with this period of racial turmoil and competing political demands. Under pressure from African Americans, Truman in 1946 created a committee to investigate the entire area of civil rights and build public awareness of the issue and the need to address it.⁵² In the year while the committee conducted its work, Truman took several steps aimed at reassuring black citizens and their white allies about his own commitment to equal opportunity. At Walter White's urging, the president accepted an invitation to speak at the Lincoln Memorial at a mass meeting to be held during the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP's) annual conference in Washington in June 1947.⁵³

White, a skilled publicist, worked to ensure the maximum amount of press coverage for the event. He paid special attention to radio, helping to arrange coverage not just from all four networks but also from most of the independent radio stations in major markets. The State Department agreed to carry the speech via shortwave for worldwide broadcast. White hoped that five hundred thousand people would assemble in local NAACP meetings at the time of the speech's broadcast "to form one gigantic mass meeting linked together by radio," making this in White's eyes possibly the largest mass meeting in the nation's history.⁵⁴

White House officials were not unaware of the political and historical significance of the occasion for Truman, who would become the first president ever to deliver a live address to the NAACP.⁵⁵ Preceded at the microphone by Eleanor Roosevelt and Walter White, Truman spoke from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to an audience estimated at about ten thousand people.⁵⁶ Truman's speech asserted that "new concepts of civil rights" meant "not protection of the people *against* the Government, but protection of the people *by* the Government." Truman also made clear that the federal government would take on the role as defender of these rights and would override recalcitrance at the state and local levels.⁵⁷

For Walter White and other African Americans, this nationally broadcast address was a culmination of a decade of requesting a presidential radio appeal on racial issues. As early as 1938 White had urged President Roosevelt to devote

a radio “fireside chat” to race relations, but he never did. In the aftermath of the riots of 1943, black activists had renewed their pleas for Roosevelt to broadcast a statement against racial violence, again without success. Truman’s 1947 radio address to the NAACP was a long-awaited and long-overdue public display of presidential support for the general principle of equal opportunity and the expansion of the federal government’s role in ensuring that opportunity.

Many African Americans saw the speech for what it was: a significant symbolic step, but one lacking in specific political proposals or commitments.⁵⁸ But for White, who believed deeply in the power of the media to change public opinion, the most significant aspect of the president’s speech was that it had been broadcast nationally and internationally and that it produced, in White’s words, “by far the largest single audience in history to hear the story of the fight for freedom for the Negro in the United States.”⁵⁹

Truman’s reference to “new concepts of civil rights” marked the public introduction of an expanded version of the federal government’s assumption of responsibility to protect citizens from the tyrannical acts of states, localities, and, eventually, private actors. Although the newness of the term “civil rights” may have shielded the president’s remarks from greater scrutiny from his critics, its meaning was not lost on other listeners from among the “several hundred million” people from all over the globe estimated by White to have heard it. A group of black American soldiers who listened to the program via shortwave on the remote Pacific island of Tinian had been so moved by the speech that they took up a collection among themselves and sent the money to the NAACP to support its work.⁶⁰ The president’s speech had not gone as far as most African Americans had wanted, but its symbolic importance was not lost either, for it sounded like the beginning of something new to eager listeners such as those on the tiny island of Tinian.

When the President’s Committee on Civil Rights issued its report in the fall of 1947, the expansive nature of the report’s recommendations exceeded most expectations. *To Secure These Rights* was a detailed blueprint for remedying sanctioned racial injustices in every aspect of American life.⁶¹ The report called for an end to all discrimination and segregation in the armed services.⁶² With its sweeping indictment, expansive recommendations, and extensive circulation, the report itself became a big news event.⁶³ Once the president laid out his broad set of specific civil rights proposals, vehement opposition coalesced. Within weeks of the speech, Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina was urging the president to withdraw all of his legislative proposals or risk a southern rebellion against Truman and the Democratic Party. Other pressures also exerted themselves on the president, including the insurgent presidential candidacy of the racially progressive Henry Wallace, who had been unceremoniously dethroned as vice president in 1944 and replaced on the Roosevelt ticket by Truman.⁶⁴

The issue of segregation had become the defining one, ultimately ending any hope for a potential alliance between African Americans, northern liberals, and southern moderates on the race issue. Although it would take another two decades of violence and struggle to move the nation to implement them, the goals of the civil rights movement lay encased in the report *To Secure These Rights*, surrounded by political controversy.

Radio and Civil Rights

This convergence of political events brought *Town Meeting* back to the question that had silenced it earlier in the decade—how to remedy the problem of racial inequality. The show returned to the issue not only with a newfound air of confidence but also with an eagerness to help rewrite the political narrative of race. Broadcasts at the end of the 1940s also reveal the evolution of a style of political engagement by radio that blurred the functions of educating, reporting, and editorializing, foreshadowing a fusion of functions that television would embrace.

Town Meeting's dedication to debate and its emphasis on audience and listener response provides an informative reading of the political reality and resistance that met the president's proposals. Also, by this time, the show was reaching twenty million listeners over 225 local stations, making it even more popular than it had been during the war itself.⁶⁵ White listeners talked back to the radio during and after these *Town Meeting* broadcasts, demanding to be heard; those listeners sensed not only that the debate was almost over but that the South's position was being silenced in defeat.

The voice of African Americans was still largely absent from these *Town Meeting* discussions, the exception being that of Walter White's. *Town Meeting* relied on White as "the" representative of the African-American position in this period. One shift from earlier years was that White and the NAACP, who had been considered too political for most radio broadcasts earlier in the decade, were now seen as acceptable and necessary participants on occasion. Other African-American leaders, most notably A. Philip Randolph, would rarely be accorded that status, a measure both of fears of Randolph's political prowess and independence and of the growing legitimacy of the NAACP among white race moderates, including those in the broadcast industry.

On a show in October 1947 about how to improve race and religious relationships, White participated in a discussion with Charles Taft, head of the Federal Council of Churches; former congresswoman and journalist Clare Boothe Luce; and Max Lerner, editorial writer for the leftist newspaper *PM*. White cast the race question in Cold War terms, arguing that Americans could not "talk of freedom and democracy" as long as African Americans were "scorned, disfranchised, segregated, denied education and jobs, tortured, even

lynched.”⁶⁶ Repeatedly African Americans in this period cast segregation as weakening American claims to international leadership, especially vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The efficacy of this appeal to moderate white listeners had not been lost on White and on others who recognized that the threat of Communist gains was more frightening to some Americans than racial equality.

White felt compelled to confront the question that loomed over all discussions of racial equality, just as Langston Hughes and Richard Wright had done in their appearances on earlier *Town Meeting* broadcasts: “Now let’s face the bugaboo of social equality and intermarriage: the \$64 question that always comes up—‘How would you like your daughter to marry a Negro?’” He answered, as Hughes had, that there was no concerted campaign among blacks to marry white people in America, but at the same time, he acknowledged, as Wright had, that the law against intermarriage “placed a premium on bastardy and illicit sexual relations.”⁶⁷ White added that antiscegenation laws “deprive women of legal protection of their persons,” meaning, though he did not speak it, African-American women who bore children fathered by white men. This new argument in favor of lifting the ban on interracial marriage aimed squarely, as Wright had in 1945, at the hypocrisy of white men who supported the law as it applied to white women and black men but not as it applied to themselves and black women.

The mention of the intermarriage issue drew an angry response once again from white listeners, but the broader topic of race and religious relationships yielded letters that attacked not just White but other issues and panelists as well. Internal mail reports characterized one-third of the comments received as “either anti-Negro, anti-Semite or anti-Catholic.” Letters expressed a broad range of concerns from fears of the Vatican and “Jewish financiers.” Some wrote to protest Lerner, who sounded, and was, much less moderate than Walter White. “Several listeners deplored Max Lerner’s exhortation to minorities to struggle to escape their caste,” the mail report explained, as many had heard his remarks as a call to violence by African Americans. Not all of the responses to the broadcast were negative. A minority praised the show for “having brought into the open the pettiness, the hypocrisy, and the bigotry.”⁶⁸

Truman’s surprising reelection in 1948 emboldened *Town Meeting* to finally confront the question that remained politically untouchable on the air: “[W]hat should we do about race segregation?” As the veteran radio moderator George Denny searched for a way to position this discussion, he fumbled through a familiar but ill-fitting paradigm:

Our melting pot—the great American melting pot—has still some lumps in it. What should we do about them? What is being done about them? Does the pot need more heat, or is the temperature about right? Will more stirring help? What should we do about race segrega-

tion in America today? One of the planks in President Truman's platform was the enactment of a civil rights program on a nationwide basis. Was the election a mandate to the Congress to pass this legislation?

The first speaker to try to answer Denny's question was Ray Sprigle, a white journalist who had disguised himself as a "Negro," traveled throughout the South, and written a series of syndicated articles about his experience. Sprigle spoke as if still in his assumed identity, taking the liberty of talking "from the standpoint of the Southern Negro." He described segregation as part of "the whole vicious and evil fabric of discrimination, oppression, cruelty, exploitation, denial of simple justice, denial of the rights of full citizenship and the right to an education."⁶⁹

By the time of this broadcast, *Town Meeting* had begun to be carried on television as well as radio. For that reason, when Denny introduced Walter White, he alerted his viewing audience that White was a "Negro" but that they would "not recognize him as such."⁷⁰ So this show had the odd pairing of Sprigle, who had temporarily turned himself into a "Negro," and White, who looked as white as Sprigle but identified himself as black. Southern journalists Harry Ashmore and Hodding Carter also appeared on the show, and Ashmore found much humor in the fact that White "seemed the most conspicuous Aryan among us, while the swarthy Carter's skin was dark enough to prompt a Mississippi theater usher to direct him to the balcony. The makeup man was instructed to darken down White and lighten up Hodding."⁷¹ The quirkiness of the politics of racial representation was never more visible.

Once again White led with his strongest appeal to white Americans: that without racial reforms, the country was a vulnerable target of Russian propaganda and subject to international shame.⁷² He characterized segregation as being antithetical to equality and offered the civil rights report as "one of many proofs that decent Americans want segregation abolished and they want it abolished now."⁷³ Ashmore, the racially moderate executive editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, reframed the discussion by arguing that the problem was not what to do about segregation "but what to do about those injustices and inequalities that have accompanied it," essentially rejecting White's claim that inequality and segregation were inextricably linked.⁷⁴

This discussion about ending segregation reveals once again how those with access to the national airwaves tried to manipulate public opinion on this crucial question, although with limited success. While Walter White was predicting that decent people were ready and willing to end segregation, Harry Ashmore was reading the 1948 election results as evidence that white southerners had already declared race no longer a political issue. Both men were engaging in rhetorical hyperbole, wishing for what was not, in hopes of making it so. If noth-

ing else was clear, it certainly was true that the question of what to do about segregation remained unresolved and unresolvable in national politics, despite the harbingers of change in 1947 and 1948.

Still, the reemergence of race as a national political concern not only eased the way for shows such as *Town Meeting* to face the segregation issue but also encouraged some moderate white southern listeners to speak more loudly. This response to the discussion about segregation surprised *Town Meeting* staff, who reported that the letters showed a “beginning of change in the attitude of Southerners,” that the relative number of letters expressing a “deep hatred” of blacks had diminished, and that there was growing support for the extension of basic citizenship rights to blacks. Still, the show’s staff concluded, these more racially moderate listeners thought that segregation could not or should not be ended immediately; rather, it should be phased out gradually, without outside intervention.

Obviously, these letters did not represent the sea change in the white southern point of view that *Town Meeting* staff reported them to be, but they were an indication that a racially moderate white minority had become convinced that change was on its way and that outright resistance offered them no opportunity to direct or control that change, although they remained deeply opposed to ending segregation. Rabidly racist responses to the question of segregation still were plentiful also, but many who subscribed to those views had begun to feel silenced by the rhetorical alliance between African Americans such as White, white northerners such as Sprigle, and southern white moderates such as Ashmore. And it was that silence that may have created the illusion among New York-based *Town Meeting* officials that the mass of white southerners might also be changing their point of view, which was clearly not so.

Not only was this not the case, but many of the listeners most opposed to the attack on segregation turned their anger against the act of discussing segregation and against the broadcast for fostering that discussion. Several letter writers argued that it was “dangerous” to discuss segregation and that the show should broadcast “no future programs” on the issue. A Memphis station reported that it had received “over 50 protest calls” during the broadcast. One listener urged that Sprigle and White be “kept off the air entirely,” and another said that she would “never listen again to your dreadful programs of hate,” referring to hatred against white Southerners. To other listeners the decision to air shows about race relations was the underlying problem: “the colored people are happy, but this stirring up of the question makes them unhappy and dissatisfied. They are negroes by the hand of God, and they cannot blame that on anyone.”⁷⁵

America’s Town Meeting continued to debate the political consequences of racial inequality early into the next decade, at a time when there was both a lull and a stalemate on the issue. In a poetic end to its run of programs about race in this period, *Town Meeting* broadcast a show in 1950 to celebrate the fortieth

anniversary of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the largest black newspaper in the country and the one most identified with African-American activism during World War II. The newspaper invited *Town Meeting* to broadcast live from Pittsburgh and paid the usual \$1,000 fee for the privilege of hosting a debate on this question: "What effect do our race relations have on our foreign policy?" This was as leading a question as any the show could offer about racial inequality in the Cold War era. The sociologist Charles Johnson, the first black president at Fisk University, wasted no time in arguing that the country's "racial system" was the "Achilles' heel of both our domestic and foreign policy." World War II, he contended, had been fought to end the "arbitrary brutalities of a master race." A questioner from the audience picked up Johnson's argument by asking how a segregated country could ever respond to "an inclusive communism." The other panelist, Congressman Brooks Hays of Arkansas, accused Johnson of emphasizing "imperfections" while ignoring the "tremendous progress" that had been made on the race issue during the previous decade. Johnson closed the show by holding up segregated schools as the clearest "indication of an incomplete democracy," a claim that was already working its way through the legal system.⁷⁶

Listener response to the show once again provided a vivid picture of the continuing deep divide about the implications of discussing the race issue at the beginning of the decade of the 1950s. One writer praised the show as one of the "finest" *Town Meeting* broadcasts ever, calling Charles Johnson "his own best argument for justice for the American Negro." But another listener wrote, "I wonder why you have so much discussion on the Negro question. It's terribly irritating to white people . . . for God's sake and white America, cut out the [Negro] question."⁷⁷

Conclusions

Radio's assumption of some civic responsibility on the race issue in this period reflects a significant transformation both in the influence of racial moderates on radio's political discussion shows and in the very nature of radio as a political medium. Radio's emergence as a political agent in the 1940s added a new dimension to the world of political symbolism in which national and international politics operated; Franklin Roosevelt knew this well and exploited it fully as a politician and as the leader of a nation at war.

Throughout the war period, members of the radio industry had looked to the federal government for political leadership and cover on how to discuss the race problem (if at all), repeatedly turning without much success to the Office of War Information. When no guidance was forthcoming, staff at *Town Meeting* approached the issue with caution, but when faced with the unavoidable question of racial remedy, they retreated for years into official silence. The concrete set of proposals in the report on civil rights finally opened the way for that dis-

cussion, and the official imprimatur of the report allowed race moderates to endorse its tenets under the guise of “educating” the public.

Harry Truman’s open rhetorical embrace of the central claims of African-American activists carried enormous symbolic power in the national discourse of the politics of race, in which radio played an important role. This was the case despite the fact that Truman’s words far exceeded his actions, a shortcoming that for African Americans nullified much of the political symbolism. Nonetheless, the World War II era spanned a marked shift in the way that racial inequality was talked about on national radio. Though the significance of rhetorical shifts should not be overstated—for, after all, words are no substitute for actions—neither should they be overlooked or casually discounted.

One notably ironic and extremely telling consistency throughout the decade, however, was the continued scarcity of African-American voices on these shows, including the complete absence of black women. Though what was being said did change in this period, who said it had not, as these deliberations about the race issue continued to be held primarily by white men. Although there was still an attempt to include representative white southern men on these panels, those whites who had laid claim to civil rights ideology apparently felt themselves better qualified than their black counterparts to advance that cause. The need to address racial inequality may have been settled as a matter of rhetoric, but accepting the fact that African Americans could and should speak for themselves on this powerful and protected medium was not.

National politics has always operated in the dual realms of action and symbols. With the advent of a mass communications system such as radio, the symbolic realm assumed an even greater authority, as the performative aspect of politics found its natural audience: a body politic of millions of listeners. In this new, expanded public sphere, the manipulation of language as political imagery became more important than ever. Without visual images and the elixir of music, political meanings on these panel discussion shows had to be spoken or left unspoken. The contest over what could and could not be said took on paramount importance and mirrored the struggle over real political boundaries and limitations. The crisis of language in turn signified the crisis in the racial order. This transition period in American race relations, with all of its promise and its limitations, played itself out eloquently and paradoxically in these political discussion programs. Radio became a perfect carrier for the performative discourse of the politics of race.

These broadcasts also captured the shifting dialectic between actions and words as race riots, black migration, and black protests pushed the political worlds of action and symbols. Harry Truman’s engagement in the symbolic and real politics of civil rights was one manifestation of that dialectic. The intellectual, moral, and legal potency of the claims that African Americans made during this decade of war, riots, and peace—as well as their emergence as a potent

northern urban voting bloc—led Truman to a rhetorical embrace of the fundamental principles of the modern civil rights movement.

The World War II era also brought a consolidation in African-American discourse about the claim for black freedom. The politics of inclusion that African Americans supported silenced earlier black nationalist claims for a separate economic and political realm and muffled antiimperialist and anticolonialist critiques. Instead, the dominant black discourse of the post-war era called for full American rights and for full access to the nation's institutions and privileges. Although such a call was conservative on its face, achieving that outcome would require an aggressive and unified claim for freedom by African Americans and a willingness to engage in the struggle necessary to attain it.

While this way of articulating black claims may have united African Americans across class, regional, and political lines, to white listeners it sounded heretical. The mere act of discussing the race question on the air was itself a rite of legitimation for African-American arguments for freedom, even as fear and extreme caution among whites accompanied this change. African Americans also repeatedly challenged the censorship that excluded them from the groups and places that spoke with authority to the body politic about themselves, their history, and their needs. Radio was one of those places. When they were able to breach the censorship, African-American intellectuals as varied as Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright presented and represented an image of "the Negro" that challenged the language of authority itself, even as more-insistent black voices remained excluded. Nonetheless, allowing African Americans to enter the realm of performative political magic was heard by the listening white public as a threat to their entire universe of social, political, economic, and sexual relations. And it was. If American racism was the national religion, the liturgical conditions were shifting, and both its adherents and its heretics recognized as much.⁷⁸

Visceral listener reactions to these broadcasts captured the cognitive and political shock that the idea of ending racial inequality stirred in most white Americans. Despite unifying wartime rhetoric, most white Americans, regardless of region, adhered to a "politics of exclusion" that depended on the continuation of racial discrimination and various forms of segregation. Indeed, this was no longer a southern problem, as many northern and western cities had responded to black migration by hardening rather than erasing the lines of racial exclusion.

The majority of white Americans plainly feared a new racial frontier where black Americans would escalate their struggle to secure the rights that democracy promised. Continued struggle would be necessary not only because of massive white resistance but also because of the limitations of white liberalism. Despite their claims to enlightenment, white race liberals were unable at the time to embrace the idea that politically sanctioned segregation and discrimi-

nation were antithetical to democracy and would need to be dismantled if “the Negro” was indeed now also “an American.”

African Americans were kept on the margins of radio’s public discourse about race relations, the rationale being that broader popular sentiment—especially southern views—required this. Lurking beneath that claim was a certain hypocrisy that obscured the fact that white liberals engaged in airing the race question were themselves hesitant about the full meaning of African-American freedom. These whites who considered themselves race liberals worked to distinguish themselves from southern segregationists, but they remained uncertain about any remedy-oriented definition on the race issue. Nonetheless, they projected confidence about their own “take” about race. Even when they invited in a few black voices, they also seemed sure that whites and only whites could lead on the race issue.

For all of these reasons, the politically permissible discourse reflected on these radio shows in the late 1940s maintained a very narrow approach to ending segregation and race discrimination. That approach, as we have seen, was consensus-oriented, casting the race problem primarily as a question of the nation living up to its founding principles, but with no engagement of the actual mechanics and fundamental restructuring essential to advancing racial equality in a society that also was founded on the principle of racial inequality. “Americans who profess to believe in democracy will have to face the dilemma of cooperating,” Rayford Logan had warned in 1944, “or of limiting their ideals to white Americans only.”⁷⁹ That was the dilemma that faced most white Americans at the end of the 1940s as well, as the politics of racial exclusion and limitation prevailed both on and off the air.

Notes

1. Initially *Town Meeting* was carried by NBC, but when NBC was forced to divest one of its two networks in the mid-1940s, ABC was formed as a result, and the show was then carried by ABC. Other popular radio panel discussions shows included the *University of Chicago Roundtable* (NBC), *People’s Platform* (CBS), and *American Forum of the Air* (Mutual).

2. For a detailed discussion of the reluctance of the *University of Chicago Roundtable* to approach the race issue, see Savage 195–206, 230–35.

3. For example, in its prebroadcast publicity, the *Baltimore Afro-American* attached great significance to the fact of the show’s airing from the Howard campus, overcoming the fact that the show’s advertised title appeared not to have anything directly to do with African Americans or race relations. *Baltimore Afro-American*, 23 May 1942 .

4. “Is There a Basis for Spiritual Unity in the World Today,” *America’s Town Meeting of the Air*, 28 May 1942, 8, 9, 11.

5. *Ibid.*, 16.

6. “Let’s Face the Race Question,” *America’s Town Meeting of the Air*, 17 Feb. 1944, 4.

7. *Ibid.*, 5.

8. *Ibid.*, 6–7, 10.

9. Ruth Barash to Denny, 6 Jan. 1949, Folder “America’s Town Meeting Reports—Mail and Ratings for ABC”; R. Huggins, “Preliminary Report on 2/17 Town Meeting,” Folder “Preliminary Mail Reports (Jan. ’44—Apr. ’45), Box 62, America’s Town Hall Collection, New York Public Library (henceforth Town Hall, NYPL). Hughes’s appearance did generate

some negative response, but very little compared to the outpouring of supportive letters. Among the negative responses were several listeners who urged that Hughes emigrate to Russia or return to Africa, and one writer referred to the broadcast as "that smelly program." qtd. in Rampersad 84.

10. Falba Ruth Conic, Jackson, MS, 2 Feb. 1944, Box 183, Fan Mail, Folder "America's Town Meeting (1944)," General Correspondence, Langston Hughes Papers, James Weldon Johnson Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University (henceforth Hughes Papers, Yale).

11. Bettye Steinberg, 18 Feb. 1944, Box 183, Fan Mail, Folder "America's Town Meeting (1944)," Hughes Papers, Yale.

12. Lucile Buford, Kansas City, MO, 24 Feb. 1944, Box 183, Fan Mail, Folder "America's Town Meeting (1944)," Hughes Papers, Yale.

13. Savannah Ruth Ivory, Spelman College, 17 Feb. 1944. Another writer critiqued all the panelists: "Your answers were 100 percent perfect. Carey McWilliams is good. Dr. Shepard was an ass as usual and of course Temple Graves was impossible." L. F. Coles, New York City, 18 Feb. 1944, Lucile Buford, Kansas City, MO, 24 Feb. 1944. Box 183, Fan Mail, Folder "America's Town Meeting (1944)," Hughes Papers, Yale.

14. Hughes.

15. Hughes, Writers War Board to Katherine Seymour, 29 July 1943, Box 169, Wim-Wz, Folder "Writers War Board," Hughes Papers, Yale. Hughes was writing in response to a request that he write scripts for a series of New York City broadcasts on racial and religious tolerance, a request he accepted but not without first venting his anger about radio's general treatment of racial issues.

16. Letter to Erik Barnouw from Hughes, 27 Mar. 1945, Erik Barnouw Collection, US 121 AF, Box 1, Folder 10, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW). Barnouw had written Hughes for permission to include Hughes's radio play *Booker T. Washington in Atlanta* in a collection of socially relevant radio dramas he was then editing (Barnouw 284-294). Barnouw's published introduction to Hughes's play reiterates the criticisms in Hughes's response but not his angry tone or his reference to Hitler.

17. "Should Government Guarantee Job Equality for All Races?" *America's Town Meeting of the Air*, 7 Dec. 1944.

18. *Ibid.*, 7, 9-10, 14.

19. *Ibid.*, 18. Kay Koch, "Confidential Audience Mail Report," 15 Dec. 1944, Folder "Audience Mail Reports, 194," Box 15, Town Hall, NYPL.

20. Kay Koch, "Confidential Audience Mail Report," 15 Dec. 1944, Folder "Audience Mail Reports, 194," Box 15, Town Hall, NYPL.

21. Ira S. Dresbach, Tiffin, OH, 13 May 1945; R. M. Halliburton, n.p., 18 May 1945, Box 26, Folder: "May 24: Are We Solving America's Race Problem," Town Hall, NYPL.

22. W. A. Poyck, Wilkes-Barre, PA, n.d.; V. S. Elliott, Birmingham, AL, 11 May 1945; Rebecca Carter, Cleveland, OH, 20 May 1945; Nancy Hale, Deshaw, MA, 12 May 1945, Box 26, Folders "May 24: Are We Solving America's Race Problem," Town Hall, NYPL.

23. Ira S. Dresbach, Tiffin, OH, 13 May 1945. Box 26, Folder "May 24: Are We Solving America's Race Problem," Town Hall, NYPL.

24. W. H. Herrwood, Seattle, WA, 20 May 1945, Box 26, Folder "May 24: Are We Solving America's Race Problem," Town Hall, NYPL.

25. "Are We Solving America's Race Problem," *America's Town Meeting of the Air*, 24 May 1945, 4.

26. This was not Wright's first appearance on *Town Meeting*. In April 1939 Wright had been among the speakers on a show entitled "Can We Depend upon Youth to Follow the American Way." Other speakers included the editor of *Vassar Magazine* and the editor of the *Yale Daily News*. Series One, Writings, Box 3, Folder 26, "Can We Depend Upon Youth to Follow the American Way?" *America's Town Meeting of the Air*, 1939 April 24," Wright Papers, Yale.

27. "Are We Solving America's Race Problem," *America's Town Meeting of the Air*, 24 May 1945, 4-5.

28. *Ibid.*, 6. By the time of his appearance in 1945, Wright had published *Native Son* (1940), *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), and most recently, to enthusiastic reviews, *Black Boy* (1945). *Black Boy* would earn the distinctions of being number one on best-seller lists and of being declared obscene by Senator Bilbo. Wright 857.

29. "Are We Solving America's Race Problem," *America's Town Meeting of the Air*, 24 May 1945, 6–7.

30. *Ibid.*, 18, 20; Box 26, Folder "Are We Solving America's Race Problem," Town Meeting, NYPL.

31. Kay Koch to Denny, 29 May 1945, Folder "Preliminary Mail Report (1945–1946)," Box 62, Town Meeting, NYPL.

32. Mrs. Henry Jay, Memphis, TN, 25 May 1945; Louise Smith, Kansas City, MO, 24 May 1945, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

33. Mrs. C. E. Fisher, Miami, FL, 24 May 1945; Louise Smith, Kansas City, MO, 24 May 1945, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

34. Anonymous, Detroit, MI, 27 May 1945, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

35. L. C. Christian, Houston, TX, 25 May 1945; anonymous, Detroit, MI, 27 May 1945, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

36. A. B. McAllister, Hinckley, IL, 25 May 1945 (Africa); Louise Smith, Kansas City, MO, 24 May 1945; ("a whole city or a whole state—two states if necessary"—anonymous), Detroit, 27 May 1945; H. C. Keller, LA, 29 May 1945; anonymous letter, 25 May 1945, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

37. "A. Nordic," Chicago, 22 Oct. 1945; Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL. (This was likely a false name.)

38. "A. Nordic," Chicago, 22 Oct. 1945; Daisy Dean, Chattanooga, TN, 25 May 1945, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

39. Forde Harrison, McAlester, OK, 24 May 1945, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

40. Letter from Chicago, name and date illegible; anonymous, Cincinnati, OH, 25 May 1945. anonymous. A listener in Washington, DC, complained that "negroes are pushing themselves in all white sections": Rosa Cooley, 17 May 1945, Washington, DC, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

41. Kelley, "We Are Not" 76, 77, 102–10, *Race* 55–57, 67–68, 70–72.

42. H. E. Weinberger, Peoria, IL, 25 May 1945. Others writing in about the lack of a white southerner included anonymous, Detroit, 27 May 1945 ("Been wondering where all the 'white brains' were"); W. R. Thompson, Greenville, SC, 9 June 1945 (next time get "well qualified Southerner"); Bob Noble, Alexandria, n.d. (not having a southerner was an "injustice"); William Estopinal, Gulfport, MI, 18 May 1945 (complained even before the broadcast that it included no "one from the deep south"), Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

43. Dorothy M. Kelly, Azusa, CA, 25 May 1945, Series One, Writings, Box 2, Folder 8, "Are We Solving America's Race Problem," Wright Papers, Yale.

44. Ira McBride, Cherryville, KS, n.d., Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

45. L. C. Christian, Houston, TX, 25 May 1945. Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

46. Ophelia Dudley Steed, Cleveland, OH, 25 May 1945. Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

47. Mrs. Thomas White, Mt. Vernon, NY, 25 May 1945, Series One, Writings, Box 2, Folder 8, "Are We Solving America's Race Problem," Wright Papers, Yale.

48. Marsden A. Thompson, 2nd Lt. A. C., Goodman Field, Kentucky, 477th Bombardment Group, 24 May 1945, Series One, Writings, Box 2, Folder 8, "Are We Solving America's Race Problem," Wright Papers, Yale.

49. Grace Morrow, Raton, NM, 28 May 1945, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

50. Robert B. Jones, Jamestown, NY, 31 May 1945, Box 26, Town Meeting, NYPL.

51. Beatrice Goodman, Brooklyn, NY, 24 May 1945; Nicoline Mass, Berkeley, CA, 24 May 1945, Series One, Writings, Box 2, Folder 8, "Are We Solving America's Race Problem," Wright Papers, Yale.

52. White 331–33; Also see Kluger 249–53.

53. White, 347–48; McCoy and Ruetten 67–68; Bernstein 279.
54. Walter White to Independent Radio Stations, June 1947, with attached list of stations; “Pres. Truman to Speak at NAACP 38th Conference,” press release, NAACP, 30 May 1947; “Largest Mass Meeting in Nation’s History Planned by NAACP,” press release, NAACP, 6 June 1947, NAACP, Part I, Reel 12. See also White 348.
55. Bernstein 279.
56. McCullough 569.
57. Truman.
58. *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 July 1947; “Truman to the NAACP,” *Crisis*, 56 (Aug. 1947): 233.
59. White 349.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *To Secure These Rights* 3–53, 79.
62. *Ibid.*, 139–73.
63. McCoy 92–93; Bernstein 283.
64. McCullough 207–8. See also Sullivan.
65. Denny to Charles Taft, 18 Sept. 1947, Box 37, Folder “October 7, 1947,” Town Hall, NYPL.
66. “What Can We Do to Improve Race and Religious Relationships in America,” *America’s Town Meeting of the Air*, 7 Oct. 1947, 4–6.
67. *Ibid.* 6.
68. Betty Cabana to Denny, 13 Oct. 1947, Folder “Preliminary Mail Reports (1945–1946),” Box 62, Town Hall, NYPL.
69. “What Should We Do about Race Segregation,” *America’s Town Meeting of the Air*, 8 Nov. 1948, 3–4.
70. It appears that the show at that time was carried only on WJZ-TV in New York City and WFIL-TV in Philadelphia, probably because of limitations in ABC’s new television operations.
71. Ashmore’s recollection is reported in Egerton 527.
72. “What Should We Do about Race Segregation,” *America’s Town Meeting of the Air*, 8 Nov. 1948, 8.
73. *Ibid.*, 10.
74. *Ibid.*, 11–13.
75. *Town Meeting* received 2,580 letters in response to the show. “America’s Town Meeting, What Should We Do about Race Segregation, November 11, 1948,” Box 57, Folder “What Should We Do about Race Segregation, November 11, 1948,” Town Meeting, NYPL.
76. “What Effect Do Our Race Relations Have on Our Foreign Policy,” 18 Apr. 1950, *America’s Town Meeting of the Air*, 3–6, 13.
77. Ruth Barash, “‘America’s Town Meeting’ Audience Mail Report,” 4 May 1950, Box 40, Town Hall, NYPL.
78. This discussion was influenced in part by ideas in Bourdieu 112–13, 115–18, 126–31, 138, 142, 153, 223–24.
79. Logan vii–viii.

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CHAPTER 12**A DARK(ENED) FIGURE ON THE AIRWAVES
Race, Nation, and *The Green Hornet***

Alexander Russo

(FROM 1936 TO 1952 *The Green Hornet* radio program followed the adventures of Britt Reid and Kato as they fought criminals who were “outside the reach of the law.” By day, Reid was a newspaper publisher and carefree bachelor and Kato was his valet, driver, and chef. But at night Reid assumed the identity of the Green Hornet and, assisted by Kato, battled criminal figures who, according to the opening narration, “sought to destroy our way of life.”) In a typical episode, broadcast in June 1941, Kato offers some sage advice on a frustrating case: “In my native Philippines, we have a saying ‘It is easier to drown in a little wave than a big one’ (*Green Hornet* episode 509).¹ “Eastern wisdom” dispensed in folk sayings was not atypical of Orientalist representations of Asians in popular culture during the 1930s and 1940s. However, longtime listeners of the show must have been surprised by Kato’s professing Filipino ancestry, as just three years prior, the show had explicitly identified him as Japanese! The ease with which the show’s producers felt they could and should ascribe a new ethnic identity to one of the show’s main characters raises a variety of questions about how radio represents race in an imagined community.

In its symbolic constructions of the United States, *The Green Hornet* represents the intersection of race, citizenship, and the public sphere. This essay addresses both the explicit cultural work that the producers intended the show to perform and the implicit assumptions that structured the program’s representational strategies. By engaging with questions regarding the legitimacy of the nation, its government, its public institutions, and its status in the world, *The*

Green Hornet played an important role in defining the contours of the national community during the tumultuous 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, *The Green Hornet* proves especially valuable because the racial representations it used to structure narrative solutions to social anxieties were produced through an aural medium. Thus this show not only provides a picture of cultural tensions surrounding the idea of nation during the 1930s and 1940s but also demonstrates the centrality of culturally constructed racial fantasies to radio's engagement with these issues.

During the 1930s and 1940s radio played a special role in defining the national community. Building on Benedict Anderson's conception of an imagined community as well as historians' and theorists' understanding of "whiteness," Michele Hilmes has argued that in this period radio programming uniquely performed a single "American" voice. Radio was the only medium capable of addressing the entire country simultaneously, and its voice was both literal and symbolic, consisting of an address to a national "we" by radio networks as well as providing a model for what a "real American" should sound like. As Hilmes suggests: "Radio created not only a marketing and distribution system, but a system of meanings, a system of transmission of cultural values and mediation of cultural tensions that valorized and 'made common' some aspects of everyday experience and marginalized or excluded others" (Hilmes, *Radio* 6). Hilmes argues that race played a central role in radio's address, an address that worked to erase distinctions between European ethnic groups while emphasizing differences between "black" and "white" (xix). Hilmes's suggestion to simultaneously consider the role of radio as a product of culture and as a system for producing cultural meaning is a valuable tool with which to explore *The Green Hornet's* ideological stance and modes of address. This program articulates a complex relationship between anxiety about the status of the nation and the position of racialized groups within that community. By examining *The Green Hornet's* mediation of cultural anxieties through racial categories we can begin to address the ways in which radio's performance of Asian and Asian-American characters complicates our understanding of the cultural constructions of race to include those that do not fit into a binary black/white framework.

The Production of *The Green Hornet*

A programming staple on network radio for twelve years, *The Green Hornet* provides a model for exploring the relationship between race, national community, and radio. On a weekly or biweekly basis, audiences followed the adventures of Britt Reid and Kato as they fought "criminals and racketeers." In a typical episode Reid would learn of a suspicious or overt criminal scheme through a newspaper article or a conversation with a reporter or other social contact. After ascertaining as much as he could from legitimate contacts at the newspaper or the police department, Reid would return to his apartment, discuss the events with Kato, and formulate a plan to pursue their own avenues of research, as the

Green Hornet and his sidekick. Very often the duo would interfere with the police or leave false clues (especially the Green Hornet's identifying seal) in order to gain time to conduct their own investigation. The Green Hornet frequently used his reputation as an underworld figure to intimidate the criminals involved into revealing clues about their plans. Likewise, the Hornet repeatedly tricked criminals into double-crossing one another or into revealing enough evidence that he could knock them unconscious with his gas gun and make an anonymous tip to the police. However, these activities prevented Reid from clearing the Hornet's name from involvement in the criminal acts and creating ever more danger should his secret identity be revealed.

The Green Hornet was a product of the network radio system that was dominant from the late 1920s to the 1950s. Radio in the 1920s featured a wide array of programming, including amateur and professional performers with local and national orientations. However, by the time *The Green Hornet* went on the air in 1936, debates surrounding radio's economic structure and the role of commercial sponsors had been largely resolved, leaving series and serials as the dominant programming forms.² Shows such as *Amos 'n' Andy* demonstrated to networks and advertising agencies the financial value of serials. Unlike anthology shows, which aired only once, series and serials could build a loyal audience by featuring the same characters week after week. Additionally, series and serials were much cheaper to produce because they did not require new actors or writers for every show and often were written by teams of writers instead of a single well-known author. The combination of audience loyalty and inexpensive production attracted advertising agencies looking for a national audience. Networks and ad agencies were able to spend more and achieve higher production values, further adding to the shows' appeal.³

The Green Hornet's content and political views stem from its position in this network system and from the show's producer, George Trendle, who had an unusually large influence on its production.⁴ Although it was broadcast on network radio for the majority of its sixteen-year run, *The Green Hornet* was not produced by one of the major networks or a national advertising agency. Rather, it originated from WXYZ in Detroit, Michigan, a part of the Mutual network.⁵ The relatively small scale of production placed ultimate authority in the hands of the station owner, George Trendle. While he was not involved in day-to-day program production, oral histories of the station provide repeated examples of Trendle's control over the station's product, ranging from providing story ideas to prohibiting any mention of sex or divorce (Osgood 62, 103–4, 120, 193). Trendle claimed to want to use *The Green Hornet* as an educational tool, a way of stressing to young people the necessity of vigilance against corrupt politicians and of voting as a political tool to achieve those ends (Bickel 134, 192; Osgood 107–10). While Trendle's influence is significant, the show's social relevance and political outlook also depended on its construction as a formula-driven series.

A series, *The Green Hornet* used commonly understood formulas and recognizable types to appeal to audiences.⁶ The program drew heavily on its sister show, *The Lone Ranger*, which was also written by Fran Striker and produced at WXYZ. The two programs shared a basic template: a courageous, white hero, a faithful sidekick of a different race, a classical music theme in the public domain to avoid royalty payments, and a deeply corrupt setting.⁷ Fran Striker, *The Green Hornet*'s chief writer, used a highly rationalized and formula-driven system that allows us to consider each element of the story in terms of how he felt it would resonate with its intended audience.⁸ This system, which Striker termed the "Morphological Approach to Plotting," was composed of modular pieces, archetypal forms, or everyday experiences, arranged in columns according to whether they referred to character traits, objectives to be reached, obstacles to be overcome, or solutions to problems. Striker would generate plots by combining different elements in endless variation. In the broadest possible terms, Striker referred to the writing process in this way: "Drama consists of a character in conflict 'A' desiring 'B' is opposed by 'C' This is conflict" (Striker, "Part I" 2). Likewise, "DESIRE opposed by OBSTACLE produces EMOTION" (Striker, "Part II" 1). Because the approach is so formulaic, plot elements were chosen carefully so that they would appeal to audiences in a given cultural context.⁹ As Fredric Jameson suggests, the narrative structures that these formulas create lead to certain genre structures and expectations in audiences (Jameson, "Reification" 1990 19). In this process, mass cultural forms function to relieve, repress, or otherwise manage cultural anxieties; they reinforce an existing status quo by presenting those anxieties and then resolving them through the narrative. For Jameson, this ideological work accounts for the popularity of mass cultural forms: audiences are drawn into narratives that engage with their hopes and fears, and they take enjoyment from the narrative solutions to those anxieties that the shows provide.¹⁰

***The Green Hornet* and the Failure of the Civic Institutions**

The Green Hornet's appeal to audiences was linked to its engagement with cultural anxieties surrounding the state of the nation during the 1930s and 1940s. The tremendous changes caused by the Great Depression and the New Deal and the increasing antagonism in world politics leading up to World War II were all sources of political and social conflict as different interests fought over the proper direction for the country. The status and proper role of the state became a central debate, as New Deal programs that attempted to bring the United States out of the Depression massively increased federal authority and military aggression challenged the state from abroad. Opposed to the idea of an interventionist state, Republicans and conservative businessmen attacked federal expansion, and eventually, in a series of decisions, the Supreme Court ruled many of the first New Deal programs unconstitutional. Perceived state receptiv-

ity to labor activism resulted in organizing drives and waves of strikes. The sitdown strike campaign of 1936 and 1937 run by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (including the infamous Flint strike that began in December 1936, an event that surely must have influenced WXYZ staff) also raised questions about whether the federal government should mediate labor/capital conflicts.¹¹ Even after Roosevelt's successful reelection in 1936, a new slate of New Deal programs and the controversy over his attempt to "pack" the Supreme Court kept debates over the size and scope of the federal government in the national spotlight (Leuchtenburg 231–51; McElvaine 264–305). Moreover, the success of politicians such as Huey Long and Father Coughlin during the first half of the 1930s demonstrated the popularity of solutions to the Great Depression that appealed to older American traditions of individualism and community, but that also took on a rhetoric of outsider status (Brinkley 143–68). With its similar focus on the individual's ability to effect social change, *The Green Hornet* addressed issues of national community through its focus on the state of civic institutions.

During this period of extended crisis, popular cultural forms engaged with these cultural anxieties and offered resolutions to social problems that competed with the New Deal's philosophy of government intervention. *The Green Hornet* represents one example of these alternative discourses, as the central organizing feature of the program is its profound lack of faith in civic and governmental institutions, which the series portrays as all incredibly corrupt. The program directly links crime to the failure of public and private officials to perform their jobs and be accountable for their performance. Within a dysfunctional body politic, administrators are corrupt and the police are helpless. A disproportionate number of crimes committed in the series involve graft, corruption, racketeering, and blackmail and often they are perpetrated by public officials. For example, in "Gas Gets the Blood," the Green Hornet exposes a political crook who economized on materials in a tunnel construction job to get kickbacks (episode 337); in "Not a Drop Worth Drinking," members of the city administration bribe a chemist to fake a report saying the water supply was contaminated so the officials could collect graft money from contracts for a new water system (episode 339); in "Charity Takes It on the Chin," the head of a special welfare office embezzles funds earmarked for relief (episode 347). In *The Green Hornet*, any official will betray the trust society has put in him or her.¹²

The Green Hornet's focus on civic corruption and criminality is an example of the ways in which social debates around the state's authority were being enacted in popular culture. At the core of debates around New Deal programs were assumptions about the proper extent of federal regulatory authority and how a state should function. Questions about a state's ability to perform properly were connected to questions about its right to regulate. Because the state's chief function is to maintain order, its ability to do so and the means by which it accomplishes that goal define whether a state is functioning properly. As such, the

government used popular culture to respond to events such as high-profile crime sprees that challenged its authority. The FBI and other agencies simultaneously attempted to apprehend criminals while also presenting themselves as representatives of an honest, interventionist state. Coverage in newspapers, radio, and newsreels as well as fictional representations meant that policy choices were being enacted in popular culture as a means of securing consent for the state (Potter 4). But beyond simple publicity, Claire Potter suggests, “[t]he figures of the policeman and the criminal were also deeply political, discursive locations for exploring the relationship between the state and citizen” (4).

In this context, when *The Green Hornet* repeatedly challenged governmental claims to moral state authority by depicting completely corrupt civic institutions, it was essentially arguing against the expansion of federal power. Indeed, in light of this civic decay, *The Green Hornet* regards attempts at government regulation to be worthless or even dangerous. In one example the show explicitly connects the sources of public corruption with attempts to regulate industry. The plot synopsis for “Appeal from Extortion” reads, “Britt Reid as Green Hornet protects the life of a businessman when a dictatorial state law allows a corrupt politician to use his office for extortion. State insurance law allows for state regulation of insurance companies with irregular business practices” (episode 437, 1). During this episode, Reid expressed to Kato the dangers posed by attempts by voters to reform and regulate business: “THE TROUBLE WITH THE PUBLIC IS THEY TRY TO LOCK THE BARN DOOR AFTER THE HORSE IS OUT! Well now it’s too late” (episode 437, 13).¹³ By depicting legitimate avenues of achieving social change, such as voting or government regulation, as ineffectual or counterproductive, *The Green Hornet* challenged a position that supported government regulation as a means of redressing social ills while also advancing the argument that individual action, not collective action, is the best way to achieve those goals.

If, for *The Green Hornet*, the complete corruption of civic institutions necessitated individual solutions to social problems, then the character of Britt Reid provided an example of how the failure of public institutions made operating outside of legal boundaries necessary. In some ways Reid appears as the pinnacle of participation within a bourgeois public sphere. He is wealthy, educated, and the publisher of the *Daily Sentinel*. Reid’s status places him in a position where he has a great deal of influence on the discussion of matters of social importance. However, despite his position, Reid’s power has only a limited effect on corruption. According to the show, Reid creates the Green Hornet because of his frustration with the inability of the state to convict criminals. The show’s opening narration describes the Green Hornet’s origins:

Britt Reid was the happy go lucky young millionaire and was the manager of his father’s newspaper, *The Sentinel*. Its reporting staff brought him many unpublishable stories concerning lawbreakers within the

law, who could not be reached through the courts. To mete out justice where the law could not act, he secretly created the character of the Green Hornet! In this role he was able to avoid legal red tape and strike at the source of unfair dealings. Because of the manner in which he operated, both the police department and the underworld as well as his own newspaper sought the Green Hornet. Orders were, "Dead or Alive, Get the Green Hornet." (Episode 53, 1)

The themes of rampant corruption unchecked by law enforcement directly challenged the claims made by government organizations and perhaps contributed to one of the enduring rumors about the show, that FBI director J. Edgar Hoover objected to the tag line "He hunts the biggest of all game! Public enemies that even the G-men cannot reach!" The replacement line continued the sentiment, but less explicitly: "He hunts the biggest of all game! Public enemies who try to destroy our America" (Dunning 299). However, the Green Hornet himself continued to remain at large, hunted by the police and criminals alike.

The Green Hornet repeatedly emphasizes the extralegal aspects of the Hornet's actions, which it deems necessary to gather enough proof to convict the criminals. Frequently the Hornet takes credit for crimes he did not commit, giving the police false leads in order to prevent them from interfering with his own plans. Very often these investigations involve muscling in on extortioners' rackets, gaining information on the scheme, then tricking the criminals into double-crossing themselves, facilitating their capture. In the episode "Katz with Nine Lives" (episode 728), one of many examples, *The Green Hornet* demands a cut of the payoff in a bribery scheme involving faked auto accidents and phony injuries. He claims to one partner that the other has sold him out. Then, with the first criminal hidden but listening to the conversation, the Hornet convinces the second criminal that the first has already turned on him. The criminals' willingness to betray one another allows the Hornet to gather enough evidence for a conviction, use his knockout gas to ensure they do not escape, and then make an anonymous tip to the police. Importantly, the Hornet is never exonerated or cleared of any of the charges against him; instead, they continue to mount with each episode, a point the program foregrounds with a concluding motif. (The program's ending narration features a newsboy shouting a typical "Extra! Extra!" followed by the conclusion of the episode in headline form. Very often the final words the listener hears are "Green Hornet still at large!" or "Police still seek Green Hornet!")

The Green Hornet and Kato: Invoking the Oriental "Other"

While vigilante heroes were not uncommon during the 1930s, *The Green Hornet* is significant for its use of racial difference to structure the hero's movement outside of mainstream society.¹⁴ Racial archetypes played a central role in allow-

ing the heroes of radio programs to negotiate a double identity in both “legitimate” and “criminal” public spheres, even when it seems as if the latter has supplanted the former. As Jason Loviglio has shown in his analysis of *The Shadow*, radio in the 1930s was responding to a matrix of anxieties surrounding the perception of a collapse of distinctions between East and West, public and private, and high and low culture. Within this racial imaginary, Orientalist archetypes were mobilized both as external threats to the social order and as the source of power that the hero draws on in “restoring a provisional order on this encoded, shadowy, noisy world” (Loviglio 322).¹⁵ But in either scenario, radio uses racial fantasy of the Oriental as a “complex site on which the anxieties of the U.S. nation state have been figured” (Lowe 4).

Edward Said’s now familiar discussion of Orientalism defines it as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.” This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is a whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasions when that particular entity ‘The Orient’ is in question (3). Said’s formulation considers Orientalist discourses not simply as a way of seeing or categorizing but as the use of particular types of representations to discursively manage and control cultural elements. One of the strongest elements of Orientalist representational strategies is the “yellow peril.” The long tradition of yellow peril discourses identifies an Oriental figure with immense, unknowable power. John Dower defines the essence of the yellow peril as “Asian mastery of Western knowledge and technique,” access to “mysterious powers” and “obscure and dreadful things,” and “mobilization of the yellow horde” (Dower, *War* 159). Referencing Orientalist themes of the yellow peril, *The Green Hornet’s* representational strategies allowed Reid to draw upon the power, support, and knowledge of the Orient to rectify problems that cannot be solved within the law.

By invoking the idea of the yellow peril, *The Green Hornet* literally and figuratively domesticates the power of the Oriental to structure its own ideological position. In his study of Orientalism in popular culture, Robert Lee suggests that yellowface representations define Asians against the white norm, marking the Oriental as “indelibly alien” and a “contaminating element” (Lee 2). In the home, Lee continues, the presence of Oriental domestics indicates destabilized domestic relations in terms of sexuality and labor (83–105).¹⁶ But how does the influence of the Oriental on the domestic (both familial and national) change when, as in *The Green Hornet*, you have a homosocial domestic relationship defined against a corrupt or otherwise dangerous outside world? There is also a long history in popular culture of an Asian male acting as a surrogate parent to a white child. In this relationship, the Asian paternal presence endows the child with special powers, which are then used to defend the father or other, weaker, Asian figures (Hamamoto 6–10; Chang). Falling within this tradition, *The Green*

Hornet elides ideas of the familial domestic with the national domestic, reverses the terms of Orientalist fear of an “other,” and uses it as a source of power.

Kato's dual function as domestic servant and crime-fighting sidekick encapsulates the show's racial logic, allowing Reid to symbolically leave and reenter the national community as part of every show. Kato quite literally performs all the necessary tasks that allow Reid to operate within the public sphere, both as a newspaper publisher and as a dispenser of vigilante justice. Kato is Reid's valet. He cooks the meals, cleans the house, and acts as chauffeur. However, his duties extend beyond domestic tasks and also facilitate Reid's entrance into a parallel criminal sphere. Kato is a skilled driver and the mechanic who maintains “Black Beauty,” the Green Hornet's car. A college graduate, Kato is also a master chemist and responsible for the Green Hornet's signature weapon, a gun loaded with knockout gas. The gas, of course, is based on secret Oriental ingredients found in Chinatown shops.¹⁷ The show's narrative of vigilante justice turns, week after week, on Reid's movement back and forth between legitimate and criminal public spheres and his successful bridging of the cultural codes of each. Lauren Berlant has argued that in the United States cultural legitimacy derives from the privilege to suppress and protect the body as the abstract subject within the public sphere. A measure of women's access to the public sphere is through their ability to suppress the signifiers of their own racialized and gendered bodies. She writes, “One of the ways a women mimes the prophylaxis of citizenship is to do what we might call ‘code crossing.’ This involves borrowing the corporeal logic of an other, or a fantasy of that logic, and adopting it as a prosthesis” (200). Reid takes the ability to selectively suppress the body one step further. In his role as newspaper editor, he utilizes the privilege his class, race, and gender status provides. However, when these reach their limits because of corruption within the public sphere, Reid turns to a fantasy Oriental body to facilitate his movement into the criminal sphere.

Reid's “code crossing” is accomplished through his adoption of a new identity as the Green Hornet. Elaine Chang has suggested that “recent history offers green as the most recognized and serviceable multipurpose signifier for human(oid) ‘otherness’” (292). Referencing *Gumby*, *Kermit the Frog*, and the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, Chang describes the process whereby ethnic, racial, and cultural signifiers are cobbled together and “marshaled, precisely in their capacity as free-floating and interchangeable signifiers, toward old and new mythologies of identity and difference, or insiders and outsiders” (296). In a similar way, by passing Reid's white body through a domestic relationship with a “yellowface” Oriental, its new, green manifestation is now endowed with “mysterious” powers that enable him to cleanse the corruption within the national domestic. As an Orientalist fantasy, Kato has access to mysterious powers, powers untouched by the contamination of membership in the national body politic. The multiple, even contradictory elements within Orientalist discourses

allow the show to mobilize a variety of racial signifiers in this colorization process. Moreover, Reid's identity as the Hornet also allows the show to disavow his privileged subject position as he reenters into the public sphere unencumbered by precisely the white male privilege that allows "legitimate" (although for Reid powerless) access. The white body thus retains its ultimate authority in the public sphere, the ability to make the body signify "everything and nothing" (Dyer 3).

However, if the show sees Kato's identity as a source of power that can be used to reassert order in the public sphere, it also takes steps to contain that power by using other common Orientalist stereotypes. These function to assure the listener that the threat of the Oriental would never supplant the white characters (and by extension, white society) it helps to define and support. Like minstrelsy, there is a long tradition of Orientalist representations of Asian characters in popular culture that the producers and audiences drew upon as a type of cultural shorthand. Kato fits into the pattern of Asian characters depicted as houseboys and gardeners. During the 1930s Mr. Moto and Charlie Chan served as counterpoints to the evil Dr. Fu Manchu and provided a series of associations through which audiences could interpret Kato in a nonthreatening manner.¹⁸ Like those characters, Kato manifests many typical Orientalist characteristics. The most readily apparent are Kato's scripted pidgin-English speech patterns. Despite his education, Kato always speaks haltingly, using improper grammar and sentence syntax. He inevitably refers to Reid as "Missa Blitt," unable to pronounce *r*'s. In addition, *The Green Hornet* relentlessly stresses Kato's devotion to Reid, always referring to him as "loyal valet," "faithful valet," or "the only living creature to know Reid's secret."¹⁹ Moreover, the show foregrounds the danger caused by that faith, which created tension in the show by appealing to the public's anxiety over whether Asians could be trusted. A typical example of where the show elaborately draws attention to the danger posed by Kato's knowledge of Reid's identity comes in episode 53. The narrator states: "Britt Reid was followed by Kato, the only living creature who knew the grim secret that meant death to the Green Hornet,—to Britt Reid—if it ever became known" (10). Kato's loyalty, when combined with his skill and intelligence, provided a model of the domesticated yellow peril, one with characteristics that are both "childlike and genius," but with the threat diminished (Dower 157).

***The Green Hornet* and World War II: Changing Threats, Changing Identities**

The Orientalist representational modes employed by *The Green Hornet* do not simply comment on the domestic dynamics of the United States; they were also intricately intertwined with the relationship between Western and Asian nations. Faced with increasing Japanese militarism and a negative public opinion of

Japan within the United States, *The Green Hornet* fundamentally changed its ideological address. The program continued to use Orientalist modes of “understanding” Asia and Asians to “explain” world events to the American people, but it was put in a position where real-world events outstripped the power of the representations to manage them. In response, the show altered its strategies of representing Kato and its ideological position regarding state power. These changes were part of the process through which race and nationhood were renegotiated as the country moved toward World War II. A reconfigured Orientalism helps to explain the persistence of racial stereotypes about the Japanese within the United States, even as conflict grew increasingly likely, as well as how those same Orientalist tropes could be reworked, once the country entered World War II, to allow certain Asian groups to be viewed as “like us” while others could be labeled evil and “less than human.”

During the 1930s and 1940s American public opinion of Japan and China underwent a complete reversal. At first Asian countries were merged into a single Oriental entity in the public consciousness. Among the few distinctions that were made, Americans viewed Japan as the most Western of Asian countries, while yellow peril discourses were generally applied to the Chinese (Dower, *War* 10; Hunt 140). The United States maintained an isolationist foreign policy, and except for periods of open military conflict, there was very little public consciousness of events occurring in Asia (Hauser). In 1931 the Manchurian incident first forced Americans to begin to engage with notions of differences between Asian countries. In 1934 Pearl S. Buck's book *The Good Earth* (later made into a movie) created a powerful representation of the Chinese as dignified and hard working, humanizing them considerably (Isaacs 155–58). The efforts of interventionist publishers such as Henry Luce also focused attention on Sino-Japanese conflicts (Gregory 5). Indeed, studies of newspapers' attitudes toward Japan and China linked the decidedly unfriendly attitudes toward Japan and the somewhat more friendly attitudes toward China to the outbreak of hostilities between the two countries (Wright and Nelson 47). By the end of the decade Japan alone assumed the mantle of yellow peril stereotypes.

During the show's first seasons *The Green Hornet* foregrounds Kato's Japanese identity. His position as valet is inseparable from his identity as a Japanese. By episode 8, broadcast in late February 1936, Kato is referred to as Reid's “faithful Jap valet,” and the three words were often repeated as a single stock phrase. Not only did a Japanese identity allow the show to draw upon Orientalist stereotypes, but it allowed *The Green Hornet* to draw on particular Japanese stereotypes of loyalty and industriousness. Japan's reputation as the most civilized of the Asian countries allowed the program to combine tropes of the inscrutable butler, the mechanical genius, and the implicit threat of the “other” within one character.

By the end of the 1930s negative connotations associated with Japan likely influenced the show's producers to consider Kato's Japanese identity a liability

in their quest for the broadest possible appeal and for attractive characters. Public opinion in the United States began to turn against Japan when that country attacked China in July 1937. Widespread international condemnation followed the Japanese bombing of civilians in September 1937 and news of atrocities committed during the “rape of Nanking,” which occurred after the capture of the city in November. A month later the Japanese sank the US gunboat *Panang*, again increasing the profile of the Asian conflict in the United States (Borg 390). During this period newspaper coverage of the events in China increased substantially. Among newspaper editorials, support for the Chinese reached a two-year peak in early February 1938, while America’s opinion of Japan was at its lowest between the months of August and March (Wright and Nelson 48). Thus at the point where awareness of Japanese militarism was rising and public opinion of the Japanese was decreasing, Kato lost his Japanese identity. Beginning with episode 203, broadcast on 18 January 1938, Kato began to be referred to as simply the “faithful valet.” For the next month Kato was referred to as both “Japanese valet” and “faithful valet,” with references to the Japanese identity in the interlude sheet but not the script proper (episodes 208 and 212). By late February, however, his Japanese identity had completely disappeared.

The Green Hornet could not erase Kato’s Asian identity completely because its racial associations were too important to the program’s narrative structure. This limbo created an ambivalence in the show’s address and treatment of Kato. At times it seems as if the program wants to eliminate any references to Kato’s Asian identity, such as in an August 1939 episode, where Kato is identified as an “Oriental valet,” but curiously “Oriental” is crossed out in the script (episode 360, 16). However, Orientalist modes of representation only increased in importance as the show attempted to manage anxieties caused by Japanese aggression. In a temporary solution, the program simply decided to ignore the issue and draw upon stereotypes of undifferentiated Orientalness. For example, “The Trapped Witness,” (episode 422), broadcast in February 1940, builds on stereotypes of Asian secretiveness and resistance to outsiders. In this episode the Hornet uses Kato to get information that he, as a Caucasian, would not be able to obtain. States Reid: “You’re an oriental, Kato, get down to that restaurant and ask a lot of questions! Those Chinese may not tell all they know to the police but they’ll have confidence in you! FIND OUT WHO THAT THIRD WITNESS IS!”²⁰ Despite such advantages, the prospect of a universal Oriental identity also posed problems. Significantly, the idea of Asian unity was uncomfortably close to pan-Asiatic Japanese propaganda regarding the “East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” (Dower 6). Fortunately, the show found a way out of this dilemma: it made Kato Filipino.

Like his earlier Japanese identity, Kato’s new Filipino identity allowed *The Green Hornet* to apply specific cultural traits that responded to the set of anxieties conjured by US-Japanese tensions. By 1941, when many in the United States

believed that involvement in the war was inevitable, Kato, still an Orientalist fantasy, began to be explicitly identified as a Filipino. By affixing a specific ethnic identity, Kato's Filipino status allowed the show to maintain its Orientalist modes of representation without the disquieting connotations of the Japanese co-prosperity sphere. An August 1941 episode, "Murder in Chinatown," is particularly revealing of the way the show attempted to manage the contradiction involved in Orientalist stereotypes of Asiatic unity and national identity. When the white reporter and police officer are not able to get any information on a killing that occurred in Chinatown, Kato is called in. Discussing their failure, Kato says, "Chinese not like talk to stranger," but then proceeds to visit Hop Sing, the Chinese man framed for the crime. The audience is left to assume that Kato's Asian identity automatically grants him familiarity with other Asian cultures. Talking with Hop Sing, Kato appeals to their shared Asian identity: "I am Filipino, velly close with Chinese. Mebbe you tell me, yes" (episode 519).²¹ Ironically, the murderers in this episode are the Purple Dragon Society, Chinese gangsters. Yet they are only operating as a front for American mobsters. Examples such as this support Dower's suggestion that Orientalist stereotypes led to an underestimation of Japanese military power (Dower, 94–111; Hunt 138–45). An Asian gang does not constitute a threat. Any actions they take are confined to an insular Asian community and thus are not the concern of the larger American society. It becomes a threat only as an extension of the power of American organized crime.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor shattered the Orientalist stereotypes of incompetence and forced a reconceptualization of American ways of understanding Asian nations, a change reflected in *The Green Hornet*. As John Dower has shown, American outrage at the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was influenced in part by white supremacist sentiments, placing the conflict in the context of a race war against all of Asia (*War* 161). At this moment Kato's Filipino identity increased in importance because it allowed the show to disseminate propaganda messages that attempted to manage this crisis. During the war, many programs integrated propaganda messages into their plot structures voluntarily, under the direction of the Office of War Information (OWI) (Horten 162).²² After the United States entered World War II, *The Green Hornet* continued to be concerned with threats to the body politic, but its basic orientation shifted as the threats changed from internal to external in origin. Throughout the war, but especially during the first six months of 1942, *The Green Hornet's* focus on public corruption and organized crime was combined with plots addressing the dangers of saboteurs and blackmail for military secrets. The opening narration was altered, now declaring: "With the help of his faithful Filipino valet Kato, Britt Reid, daring young publisher matches wits with racketeers and saboteurs. Risking his life that criminals and enemy spies may feel the weight of the law by the sting of the Green Hornet" (episode 572). Like earlier shows, the plot fre-

quently turned on issues of identity; however, these were now magnified as the show addressed public anxieties about the ability to determine loyalty. In one typical example, "The Corpse That Wasn't There," the Green Hornet and Kato foil the attempts of German agents to sneak a saboteur into a defense factory by impersonating a man with a clean record (episode 566).

However, meeting the OWI's demands to integrate war messages into program plots forced *The Green Hornet* to fundamentally restructure its ideological address, demonstrating a changing relationship between race and nation. *The Green Hornet* began by openly championing the government in the most direct way possible for a radio program, commercial sponsorship. Often broadcast on a sustaining basis, the show now opened with this solemn request: "In the interest of our government, the King-Trendle Broadcasting Corporation ask you to accept Uncle Sam as sponsor of the Green Hornet program" (episode 572). During a number of programs, such as "Invasion Plans for Victory," the show requested that its listeners buy war bonds (episode 556). In essence, *The Green Hornet* asked its listeners to view the United States government as they would any other company and purchase its products. Thus while it is not surprising that the program moderated its earlier antigovernment tone during the war (although it never fully stopped), the fact that the show actively became an agent of the government demonstrates the changes in both the show's ideological position and the political climate.²³

While many network radio shows integrated war messages into their plots, *The Green Hornet's* racial logic of a non-Japanese Asian fighting against infiltration countered US fears of an Eastern race war against the West. Simultaneously it authorized a race war against Japan (Kato's role in these propaganda messages, like the role occupied by Filipino characters in World War II combat films, served to further delineate "good" Asians from "bad."²⁴ A non-Japanese ally was necessary to counter the same Orientalist stereotypes that conflated all Asians. It also countered fears of an Asian "yellow horde" uniting to attack the West.) Like the figures of African-American and Japanese-American soldiers, Kato's presence also allowed the disavowal of racist practices in American society. The image of Filipino soldiers fighting alongside American at Corregidor only strengthened these types of associations and allowed the relationship between Reid and Kato to reinforce such ideas in the listeners' minds.²⁵

Radio and Cultural Constructions of Race, Nation, and Sensory Experience

The most striking thing about *The Green Hornet's* use of Orientalist stereotypes is that despite their seeming banality, they were crucial to the program's narrative structure. The show's mobilization of racial categories to mark Reid and facilitate his movement outside of the "legitimate" public sphere, as well as to ease anxi-

eties about growing Japanese militarism, demonstrates the link between constructions of race and nation. *The Green Hornet* serves as an example of Lisa Lowe's suggestion that "[t]hroughout the twentieth century, the figure of the Asian immigrant has served as a 'screen,' a phantasmatic site, on which the nation projects a series of condensed, complicated anxieties regarding external and internal threats to the mutable coherence of the national body" (18). Initially, as *The Green Hornet* entered debates about the role of the state and the status of the national body politic, the program drew on racial modes of representation, because as an Asian, Kato was, by definition, within yet outside the nation.²⁶ For a program concerned about civic corruption, Orientalist fantasies of "mysterious powers" provided a useful device to address real fears about how the government was responding to the Great Depression. Later, as events overran these representational strategies, *The Green Hornet* was able to use a reconfigured Orientalism to respond to the military threat posed by Japan and internal fears about distinguishing ally from enemy. In both cases, the solution to cultural anxieties lay in invoking an Orientalist fantasy, first of a domesticated yellow peril, later of an Asian "like us" who fights the Japanese. But while it is significant that a popular cultural text used race as a way to address cultural anxieties, more important are the ways in which the same general modes of racial signification could operate to fill a variety of ideological roles. Their malleability allowed the show to use race as a flexible tool that adjusted to changing situations. While this functioned to shore up notions that "our" national community is stable, well defined, and natural while "they" are constantly changing, slippery, and unreliable, it also demonstrates how notions of race and identity, far from being natural and static, are culturally determined and linked to a specific social context. Finally, the ease with which the show could alter racial characters forces us to reevaluate the means through which racial identity is perceived through the senses.

If the cultural significance of *The Green Hornet's* Orientalist modes of representations comes from the cultural context of their production and consumption, this also informs our understanding of the relationship between racial formation, radio, and sensory experience. Radio's "dramatic economy"—its "greatest strength," according to Rudolf Arnheim—lies in the fact that radio does not have to physically account for the presence of its characters: "the art of radio drama sets 'existence' very clearly in relation to artistic function: one only exists as long as one has a function" (156). What, then, is the aesthetic function that drives the existence of racialized representations on radio? On radio, race becomes reduced to pure sign. Dialect and its cultural references are merged with narrative forms and narration to construct ways of hearing race without seeing bodies that are racially marked. As Michele Hilmes has suggested, the threat generated by radio's potential to escape visual overdetermination necessitated an "endlessly circulating and performing structured site of social and cultural norms—all through language, dialect, and carefully selected aural context"

(*Radio 21*). However, operating in an arena where skin color is not necessarily linked to racial identification, aural markers of racial difference are denied the protective cover of a physical body to refer to and use to naturalize themselves, thereby drawing attention to their cultural specificity. Thus even as these markers struggle to maintain the social divisions they signify, they expose their own cultural construction, as well as the social construction of all sensory experience. As Ruth Benedict said of Franz Boas: "He returned [from the Arctic] with an abiding conviction that if we are to understand human behavior we must know as much about the eye that sees as about the object seen. And he understood once and for all that the eye that sees is no mere physical organ but a means of perception conditioned by the tradition in which its possessor has been reared" (qtd. in Jacobson 10). Ultimately, then, we might make the same suggestion for future investigations into aural constructions of race on radio and account for the ear that hears as well as the object heard.

Notes

1. The first 260 episodes of *The Green Hornet* were untitled and were only given a show number. Shows produced after 9 Aug. 1938 had titles as well as numbers. Scripts referred to are in the Fran Striker Script Collection, Lockwood Memorial Library, State University of New York at Buffalo.

2. There is a growing literature on the history of radio from the 1920s through the 1940s. See, for example, Douglas, *Listening In*; Hilmes, *Radio, Hollywood*; Horten; McChesney; Savage; Smulyan. See also Barnouw (1968, 1966). Smulyan and McChesney, in particular, chart the process through which programming choice and quality were defined through commercial terms. So while network radio forms continued to evolve throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the economic relationships and structures within which those programs were produced remained fairly static.

3. For an excellent discussion of soap opera serial form, see Allen.

4. For the role of the producer in another medium during this era, see Thomas Schatz's work on David O. Selznick.

5. WXYZ later affiliated with NBC Blue but continued to be an independent producer of programming.

6. Recent questions about the status of the television text are equally relevant to network radio shows. Is a text a single show, a season, the entire run? Serialized programming forms, repeats, and syndication all complicate our understanding of how televisual programs work. Intertextuality increases those difficulties. Coverage in other media or film/television crossovers are but a few examples. *The Green Hornet* is no exception. While I am bracketing the radio program for analysis, we cannot discard other Green Hornet texts that existed alongside it. A thirteen-episode Green Hornet film serial was produced by Universal Studios in 1940. Fran Striker wrote several Green Hornet pulp novels, and a Green Hornet comic book ran from 1940 to 1948 (the comic book was especially anti-Japanese during the war). The multiplicity of Green Hornet texts surely influenced the ways in which people listened to the radio program.

7. For a discussion of the relationship between *The Lone Ranger*, *The Green Hornet*, and *Challenge of the Yukon*, see Schwartz and Reinehr 77–80. *The Lone Ranger* and *The Green Hornet* also shared mythology as well as genealogy. Supposedly the Green Hornet was a blood relative of the Lone Ranger. The Lone Ranger had raised Britt's father, Dan, because he was his nephew, making Britt Reid his grandnephew.

8. There is some discrepancy about the number of shows actually written by Striker. While he is given official credit for at least the first five years, a biography written by his son contends that actually scripting the show was a joint effort among the WXYZ writing staff (Striker Jr. 73–74).

9. For an introduction to genre analysis and television, which functions in a similar way, see Feuer.

10. While audiences may view these resolutions with varying degrees of skepticism, as numerous reception studies have suggested, it is clear that the producers and writers of *The Green Hornet* intended it to do this kind of ideological work. For some useful introductions to reception studies see, for example, Ang; Morley; Silverstone.

11. The Flint strike has particular resonance here not only for its proximity to WXYZ but also as a focal point for debates surrounding the role of the government. The refusal of Michigan governor Frank Murphy to use National Guard troops to evict the workers certainly focused conservative fears while also embodying worker hopes for governmental aid (which would remain equally elusive).

12. This show also serves as an example of the show's conservative position regarding social welfare. At one point Britt Reid states: "For a city of our size, more money is being spent on relief than conditions warrant."

13. *The Green Hornet* was not alone in voicing skepticism about the wisdom of the mass public. As Jason Loviglio has shown in his examination of *The Shadow*, there was considerable cultural anxiety during this period about the crises of the public sphere generated by the "loss of control over the means of communication, information and entertainment" (Loviglio 322).

14. On vigilante heroes, see, for example, Warren Susman's discussion of pulp fiction characters in this period (18–20).

15. There are a number of similarities between Lamont Cranston's mastery of cultural codes as he moves between private and public spheres and Reid's movement between legitimate and criminal public spheres. Both maintain upper-class social positions. Both draw upon mysterious Oriental powers. Ironically, however, it is the failure of legitimate communications technologies in Reid's world that prefigures his incarnation as the Green Hornet, whereas the Shadow's power stems from his control over these modern means of communication (Loviglio 321–25). Moreover, *The Shadow* is obsessed with the threat of "alien contamination" of the public sphere whereas in *The Green Hornet* it is already so thoroughly contaminated that one version of the Oriental "other" must be brought into the private domestic space in order to fight it.

16. Lee makes an argument based on the coming of domesticity to the western frontier in the late 1800s. However, given the self-conscious link *The Green Hornet* makes to the frontier through the bloodline of the Lone Ranger, the metaphor seems appropriate.

17. See for example, *The Green Hornet* episode 56. In this episode, Reid is concerned about a scientist who has found the formula for the knockout gas, and sends Kato out to follow him. Kato reports back: "Scientist Hainsworth thinks he has found formula of the Green Hornet's knockout gas." Reid responds: "I know you told me that he was searching the drug stores in the oriental section of the city for certain drugs chemicals, but I didn't think he'd FIND THE SECRET SO SOON" (13).

18. For sources on Fu Manchu see Dower, *War* 157–60, 345 n. 16; Lee 113–17. For other discussions of Asian representations in popular culture, including Fu Manchu, see Choy; Lee; Marchetti; Oehling; Isaacs; and Hamamoto.

19. There are, of course, homosocial elements to the Reid-Kato relationship that bear investigation. Citing literary critic Eve Sedgwick, Lee suggests it is in the boundary of the frontier that the register of the homosocial is expressed: "Although the homosocial is constituted by that which is not sexual and is distinguished from the homosexual it does not exist independently of the erotic but rather is deeply infused with desire" (87). *The Green Hornet* essentially transferred the western setting of *The Lone Ranger* to a contemporary urban set-

ting. Reid, Axelford, and Kato live together in the homosocial world of the Reid mansion. Axelford was supposedly contracted by Reid's father to act as a bodyguard—to guard, we ask, from what? Kato supplies the domestic labor, both cleaning and preparing the meals, but also maintaining the crime-fighting equipment of the Green Hornet. In spite of his playboy reputation, Reid does not date women. The listener may well assume that he finds nocturnal crime fighting with Kato more enjoyable than pursuing women. Given Kato's complete competence at both domestic tasks and his public role as superhero sidekick, it seems he is able to serve all of Reid's needs. The listener can speculate as to what other unspoken roles Kato might play. Reid and Kato carry on a secret and illicit relationship without the knowledge of their chaperone. Indeed, there are repeated instances when Reid and Kato fret because they worry their nocturnal activities will raise the suspicions of Axelford. See Marchetti for the dangers implied by interracial sexual relations.

20. Similar to other episodes, the murder in question is the result of lack of payment in a "cigar store racket."

21. Ironically, the name Hop Sing later was taken by the creators of *Bonanza* for the Asian houseboy character (Hamamoto 7, 33–39).

22. For more on the role of radio in broadcasting propaganda and managing cultural conflicts, particularly around race, during World War II, see Douglas; Hilmes, *Radio* 230–70; Horten, Savage, and Meckiffe and Murray.

23. Similarly, by 1948 the Green Hornet had begun to operate as an agent of the police commissioner, with whom he has shared his secret identity. By this point the program had completely reversed its prior position and now acted as an agent of the state (episode 841). I was not able to discover the exact date that this agreement was reached only that it had occurred by 1948. The television series takes this even further. In it the secret state approval is highlighted in the title sequence. "Another challenge for the Green Hornet, his aide Kato, and their rolling arsenal The Black Beauty! On police records a wanted criminal, the Green Hornet is really Britt Reid, owner-publisher of the Daily Sentinel. His dual identity known only to his secretary and to the District Attorney" (Van Hise 12).

24. For examples of the role of Filipinos in World War II combat films, see Slotkin 324 and Basinger 45. See Dower (*War, Race*) for examples of racial attacks on Japanese and Japanese Americans during the war. This racial logic is true of other Green Hornet media as well, even more explicit when in a visual medium. In one example, a Green Hornet comic book from 1944, titled "Unwelcome Cargo," the cover art features the Green Hornet and Kato boarding a ship at dock. The ship's crane is unloading a Patton tank. The Green Hornet and Kato are shooting Asian figures who had taken over the ship. One of the Asians, peering out of a ventilation shaft, has a rising-sun bandana, and all have simian features.

25. See Meckiffe and Murray for more on the function of the discursive figure of the African-American soldier during World War II.

26. For more on Asians and on Asian Americans' status as within, yet outside the national community, see Lowe.

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CHAPTER 13**EXPATRIATE AMERICAN RADIO
PROPAGANDISTS IN THE EMPLOY OF THE
AXIS POWERS**

William F. O'Connor

THE WORD *propaganda* HAS ITS ROOTS in religion. In 1622 Pope Gregory XV announced the establishment of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, one purpose of which was to regain through catechizing and other forms of proselytizing the lands lost to the Protestant Reformation. *Propaganda* eventually acquired other meanings, the ones with which contemporary laymen are familiar, and a close association with politics. Indeed, the words *political* and *propaganda* constitute a rather high-frequency collocation in present-day American English.

War provides the propagandist with employment and opportunities to take his or her art to a higher level of development through experimentation with new techniques and emerging media. In the years preceding the outbreak of hostilities between the Allies (Great Britain, the United States, and others) and Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan, and others), it became practicable to use the medium of radio in efforts to persuade foreign audiences of the legitimacy of one's cause. Once the conflict had begun, the medium could be employed to wage verbal and psychological warfare to supplement efforts made on the battlefield. The number of international radio stations operating in Europe stood at a paltry three in the 1930s. By the beginning of the next decade there were over forty such stations, with Germany being responsible for much of the growth (Wasburn 13).

The Third Reich clearly valued the power of radio. Joseph Goebbels, minister for propaganda, was keenly aware of the utility of the medium. Domestic

audiences could be verbally persuaded to conform to the norms of Nazi Germany while simultaneously being imbued with a spirit of national community, which might serve to negate the class conflict that characterized German society in the days of the Weimar Republic (Welch 30).

Goebbels, according to Reuth, saw radio as an authoritarian medium (176), as indeed it is. Communication is in most instances one-way. Rebuttals and queries, which have the potential to frustrate the propagandist's objectives and are options open to the average newspaper reader through the letters-to-the-editor column, are usually denied to the average listener. Goebbels placed so much faith in the power of radio that he had "loudspeaker columns erected on streets and squares" (176). He also promoted the production of an inexpensive radio receiver known as the *Volksempfänger*, or people's set, which was initially priced at a reasonable 76 marks. By early 1941 approximately fifty million people had access to about fifteen million of these receivers (Bergmeier and Lotz 8).

Germany's minister of propaganda was cognizant of radio's possibilities vis-à-vis foreign audiences too, especially with respect to the large group of potential listeners in Great Britain. It was, according to Reuth, his "major tool" (276), and he employed it both overtly, through broadcasts clearly identified as emanating from the Third Reich (in the lexicon of propaganda analysis, when the source of the message is identifiable, the adjective *white* is used; e.g., "white propaganda"), and covertly, through the use of black (i.e., clandestine) radio stations, to spread fear and suspicion. Black stations normally attempt to conceal their respective locations, objectives, and sponsorship for the purpose of conveying the impression that they are being run by a domestic opposition that views governmental policies as inimical to the interests of the nation or a segment of the populace therein.

Among the numerous black stations run by the Reich, the five whose efforts were directed at the United Kingdom clearly illustrate how such stations operate and seek to fan the flames of dissatisfaction by exploiting domestic class, ethnic, religious, and political cleavages. Workers' Challenge, for example, sought to mine the vein of class hostility assumed to be smoldering in the highly stratified United Kingdom by targeting the British proletariat. Despite its provenance—Nazi Germany—Workers' Challenge adhered closely to Marxist precepts and even exhorted its listeners to voice support for Russia in its struggle with the Third Reich by pressuring the government to open a second front (Bergmeier and Lotz 210–11). Language, specifically register, was employed to maintain verisimilitude and camouflage the station's location and true objectives. The idiom of the British working class (or what the Germans thought was their idiom) was employed extensively. By the standards of the day, Workers' Challenge broadcasts were shocking, as they were laden with swear words. This attribute attracted an unintended listenership, one that was tuning in to hear social conventions violated. Leonard Ingrams of British intelligence related how

“old ladies in Eastbourne . . . are listening to it [Workers’ Challenge] avidly because it is using the foulest language ever” (Bergmeier and Lotz 210).

The second and third clandestine stations broadcasting to Great Britain were Radio Caledonia and the short-lived Welsh National Radio. Both were designed to exploit dissatisfaction within two components of the Celtic fringe, Scotland and Wales, respectively. The former anticipated contemporary developments in its call for Scottish independence.

The fourth station, the Christian Peace Movement, disseminated pacifist sentiments, on occasion resorting to biblical phraseology, as this excerpt from their 21 August 1940 broadcast attests: “Judge not that ye be not judged, and with what judgement ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Bergmeier and Lotz 211).

The indisputable flagship of black stations in Goebbels’s English-broadcasting arsenal was the New British Broadcasting Station (NBBS), which operated on a daily basis from February 1940 to April 1945. Noteworthy black characteristics of the NBBS broadcasts were their attacks on National Socialism and their parting musical number, “God Save the King.” The NBBS played an ancillary but, from the standpoint of psychological warfare, important role in Hitler’s Operation Sea Lion, the planned but never-realized invasion of the British Isles. Broadcasters sought to convey the impression that a Fifth Column was active in the UK, one whose members would facilitate Germany’s interests. On 11 September 1940 Goebbels made the following entry in his diary: “Straight and secret broadcasts both to focus on creating alarm and panic. We are putting on the big squeeze” (Bergmeier and Lotz 213). Goebbels’s version of radio terrorism inspired the movie *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror* (1942).

The NBBS was primarily a foreign-run operation in the sense that many of the broadcasters were Britons. The “driving force” behind the NBBS, according to Bergmeier and Lotz (205), was a man who would gain notoriety primarily for his white broadcasts on behalf of the Reich and for the rather unusual treatment he was accorded by the British government after the war: William Joyce, aka Lord Haw-Haw.

The Third Reich employed a number of American expatriate radio propagandists to produce white propaganda, some more talented than others. There were Douglas Chandler, a former photographer for *National Geographic* magazine, and Robert Henry Best, a Columbia University graduate and journalist, both of whom broadcast under the somewhat ludicrous pseudonym of “Paul Revere” (Best also as “Mr. Guess Who”). Clattering hooves and the song “Yankee Doodle” were associated with the Paul Revere broadcasts. Max Otto Koischwitz, a former professor at Hunter College, took to the airwaves as “Dr. Anders,” and his paramour, would-be actress and erstwhile Berlitz instructor Mildred Gillars (aka Axis Sally), sent her sultry voice out to listeners of such shows as *Midge-at-the Mike* and *Home Sweet Home*. And Atlanta, Georgia’s Jane Anderson, the wife of a Spanish

nobleman and the model for Joseph Conrad's heroine in *The Arrow of Gold*, his last novel, lent her "shrill-voiced neuresthenic [sic]" (Neville 4) personality to the cause of the Third Reich. But none of the aforementioned was as significant as William Joyce, who was, in the words of Bergmeier and Lotz, "probably the only truly professional foreign political agitator working on the Berlin radio . . . [and] the first radio propagandist to become an international celebrity" (99).

Joyce's "Lord Haw-Haw" nickname was coined by Jonas Barrington, a writer for the *Daily Express*. Barrington was most likely describing Joyce's predecessor, Norman Baillie-Stewart, whose vocal features approximated the qualities of haughtiness and condescension that the writer was attempting to lampoon. Nevertheless, Joyce adopted the nickname, and it was often employed generically, with some minor variations—Lady Haw-Haw, Lord Hew-Haw—to describe other Axis-employed propagandists.

Joyce, whose signature "Germany calling" preceded his commentaries, used his time behind the microphone to present the Reich's perspective on a host of topical issues. It is difficult to describe Haw-Haw's broadcasts in only a few words, because their tone was so variegated, changing in tandem with the vicissitudes of the war—relatively light, ostensibly pro-British, then sneering, and finally rueful. Joyce was not averse to the use of ad hominem attacks in his broadcasts, and one of his favorite targets was Britain's wartime prime minister, Sir Winston Churchill. If one word were to be chosen to describe the broadcasts, the word *trenchant* would prove apt. Unlike some of his expatriate colleagues in the employ of the Reich, Joyce's commentary and delivery bore the hallmark of the professional.

William Joyce was born in Brooklyn, New York, on 24 April 1906 and remained an American national until he acquired German citizenship in September 1940, long before the United States entered the war. His family left New York, settled in Galway, Ireland, and eventually took up residence in England, where William graduated from Birkbeck College of London University. His attraction to right-wing politics at first led him to Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. He later split with Mosley and established his own, more extreme National Socialist League, where his street-corner oratorical skills, as well as his street-fighter demeanor, eventually attracted the attention of the authorities. When it seemed as if war between Great Britain and Germany was inevitable, Joyce, who made no secret of his pro-Nazi sympathies, felt it advisable to leave the country for Germany.

Like many of his Axis-employed colleagues, Joyce was a rabid anti-Semite. He was also firmly convinced that the Soviet Union was Britain's true enemy and that Germany constituted a formidable obstacle to Soviet expansionism. These two factors, combined with his need for gainful employment in his adopted homeland, appear to have motivated him to pursue a broadcasting career and animated some of his broadcasts.

The Germany-as-bulwark theme is clearly evident in his final and arguably most dramatic broadcast, beamed from Hamburg on 30 April 1945, after Hitler had been replaced by Admiral Dönitz and Germany's struggle was an endgame. The Joycean histrionics were enhanced by the fact that he was quite clearly intoxicated at the time of the broadcast, having just come from a farewell party with his colleagues. The ominous message conveyed in the last paragraph was partially validated by subsequent developments in the postwar era:

[The Soviet Union is] the greatest threat to peace that has existed in modern times. Britain's victories are barren: they leave her poor, and they leave her people hungry; they leave her bereft of the markets and the wealth that she possessed six years ago. But above all, they leave her with an immensely greater problem than she had then. We are nearing the end of one phase in Europe's history, but the next will be no happier. It will be grimmer and perhaps bloodier. And now I ask you earnestly, can Britain survive? (Hall 302)

How sizable was Haw-Haw's British audience? Selwyn finds it not insignificant. An internal report prepared by the BBC in March 1940 entitled *Hamburg Broadcast Propaganda: A Summary of the Results of an Inquiry into the Extent and Effect of Its Impact on the British Public during Midwinter 1939/40* surmised that one out of six Britons listened to Joyce regularly and four out of six were occasional listeners. Furthermore, it was revealed that the regular listeners were the politically knowledgeable (108). Twenty-nine percent tuned in to Haw-Haw to ascertain the German perspective, while 26 percent did so to obtain news that the BBC was not broadcasting (109).

The lesser lights in Goebbels's expatriate firmament of radio propagandists addressed, to varying degrees, some of the same themes. All were dissatisfied with the United States, and many used their time at the microphone to broadcast ad hominem attacks on Allied leaders and to deliver anti-Semitic harangues. Some, such as Jane Anderson, appear to have been primarily ideologically motivated to provide service to the Axis, while the impetus for others seems to have arisen initially from some negative experience related to employment or pecuniary matters that left them emotionally scarred and embittered.

Chandler is a good example of those who primarily fall into the latter category. This twentieth-century Paul Revere left the United States on 3 September 1931, after the 1929 stock market crash rendered him jobless and his own investments had negatively impacted his wife's assets (he was married to heiress Laura Jay Wurts, a descendant of John Jay). In *Berlin Calling*, John Carver Edwards addresses the impact that this sour-grapes factor had on the subject. Chandler was dismayed by the dearth of business opportunities in his homeland, the superficiality of what posed as high culture there, and those who he perceived to be manipulating the country's wealth (i.e., Jews) (137).

The Chandlers traversed Europe, where he did a number of stories for *National Geographic* and eventually acquired a position with the Reichrundfunk's USA Zone. The pseudonym of Paul Revere was chosen because it was "peculiarly appropriate as the British were so intensively organized in their propagandistic battle in the United States for American participation in the war" (Edwards 127). Certain segments of the American public did not view the United Kingdom as a benign entity—the Irish-American community, for instance—and many Americans were chary of supporting a nation whose class system diverged radically from the myth of American egalitarianism. The Paul Revere persona could serve as a symbolic pseudonymous tocsin, and Chandler and Best would be the ones to sound the alarm.

Typical of Chandler's broadcasts were bombastic greetings, invective against Jews, personal attacks on Roosevelt, and warnings regarding the Bolshevik threat. The Monitoring Division of the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service of the Federal Communications Commission furnished the Federal Bureau of Investigation with a number of transcripts of Chandler's broadcasts. The following are excerpts from one made on 8 September 1944:

From the heart of the great, imperishable German Reich, your messenger Paul Revere greets you again. Compatriots and Friends:

He [Omar Khayyam] could not preview the sellout of his land by a pair of western hemisphere opportunists, a sellout to the . . . (god) (hordes) of Stalin's Teheran. The names of these traitors to christian [sic] civilization are Roosevelt and Churchill.

Today by virtue of their contract with the Bolshevik state both stand as the archenemies of western European civilization. . . .

Ah, the clock time now warns me, Paul Revere, that my time for tonight is up. . . . Goodnight, compatriots and friends. Remember that only a full realization of the horror of Jewish bolshevist communism will stem the tide of Rooseveltian's [sic] diversions and help us to get our country back.¹

Robert Henry Best's name is often linked to that of Chandler. Like Chandler, Best was a journalist, a stringer for United Press in Vienna. He was also embittered, displeased with the treatment accorded him by his employer, for which he blamed the Jews. Edwards relates how Best had spent fifteen years with United Press, where his attempts to rise within the organization were thwarted by a succession of bureau chiefs who regarded him as simply a liaison between themselves and local stringers: "Colleagues with careers in similar mid-life doldrums might blame their callous bosses or a competitive occupation, but Best fancied himself the victim of Jewish interests" (106).

Allusions to the American icon Paul Revere, the threat of Bolshevism, and disparaging remarks about Jews, not unfamiliar themes in Chandler's broad-

casts, can be found in the following excerpt from Best's 16 June 1943 broadcast, as it appears in a transcript prepared by the FCC's N. A. Doellinger:

Friends, foes, fence stragglers and anyone else who may care to add to their knowledge by listening in. . . .

The voice, as you have doubtlessly noted is that of Robert H. Best, speaking to you as a 1943 Paul Revere, and his message is, of course, the same as that of the original Paul Revere; namely, the Red Coats are coming—the Red Coats are coming! To arms, to arms, you patriots!!!

The vanguard of the Red Coats in fact is already in both America and in England, in the guise of apologists for the so-called democratic constitution of the Soviet Union. . . .

The only thing that really matters is the fact that the door has been opened wide by Churchill and Roosevelt for a Bolshevist Revolution in Britain and in America, through their alliance with the kike commissars of the Kremlin.²

Max Otto Koischwitz (aka Dr. Anders and Mr. O.K.) was born on 19 February 1902 in Silesia, a long-disputed region that at various times has been controlled by states populated primarily by Germans. In 1924 he graduated from the University of Berlin and soon thereafter immigrated to the United States in search of employment, eventually finding a position at Hunter College as an assistant professor of German. He proved a popular and dynamic teacher, a prolific writer, and, initially at least, exhibited no signs of anti-Semitism or alienation from the United States, his adopted homeland (Koischwitz was naturalized on 29 March 1935), and its culture. He unequivocally and publicly denounced Nazism in 1933 (Edwards 62). Furthermore, Hitler's ascension to power did not initially affect his relationship with his Jewish students at Hunter. Edwards recounts how he once tried in vain to arrange a stay abroad for a Jewish protégé who had secured a German scholarship, and was profoundly disappointed by his failure (62).

Despite his popularity among Hunter's students, his impressive list of publications, and his theatrical and effective approach to pedagogy, Koischwitz failed to secure a promotion from the college, and in the mid-thirties his lectures began to change. He focused more on the decadence of the West and the glories of Teutonic culture and less on German literature. There seems to have been more than a tenuous link between Koischwitz's employment predicament at Hunter and his newly acquired *Weltanschauung*: "One suspects that the frustration associated with his stagnant career may have driven him to provocative measures" (Edwards 64). When on 1 September 1938 the college denied him the title of professor by granting him tenure as an assistant professor, the "action dissolved Koischwitz's last tie with his adopted country" (Edwards 70).

Eventually Koischwitz obtained a leave of absence from the Board of Higher Education and left for Europe on the eve of World War II. Circumstances in the United States (i.e., action threatened by the American Council against Nazi Propaganda) made return to his adopted homeland unadvisable, and he once again took up residence in the land of his birth, where he soon assumed his position behind the microphone.

Befitting his former occupation, Koischwitz's broadcasts often assumed a professorial tone. He took metaphorical swings at such literati as Dorothy Thompson, Sinclair Lewis, and William L. Shirer. His commentary was not devoid of subtlety, as is evidenced by the following excerpt from this 18 November 1943 pre-Thanksgiving *Home Sweet Home* broadcast, directed at American servicemen and done in conjunction with his lover, Mildred Gillars:

Well, I think there are a great many things to be thankful for this year. Be thankful for the privilege of seeing the world free of charge and for the good chance to go to Heaven before going home. Be thankful that your folks back home have joined the class of the higher tax-payers, that they pay higher prices than ever before, that many commodities of yesterday have become scarce and rare, that working hours have increased and that the extravagant American standard of living has finally come down to a more reasonable low level. Be thankful that you have escaped the dull routine of your peace time jobs and for the honour to waste your time like a rich man, without suffering from the burden of wealth. Be thankful for the sorrow that this last year has brought to the U.S.A., thanks to Roosevelt and his advisors, for the anxieties and worries, the thrills and the sensational excitements and fears which interrupted the otherwise empty and uninteresting American life.³

Mildred Gillars (aka Mildred Elizabeth Sisk) was born in Portland, Maine, on 29 November 1900. She studied drama at Ohio Wesleyan University but left before graduation to embark on an acting career, eventually settling in Greenwich Village. Arguably the apex of her lackluster career as an actress came in 1928, when she participated in an elaborate hoax to promote a movie entitled *Unwelcome Children*. Gillars, posing as Camden, New Jersey, housewife Barbara Elliott and feigning pregnancy, walked into the offices of a Camden newspaper to place an advertisement calling for the return of her husband. The newspapers ran with what appeared to be an engrossing human-interest story. "Barbara" asserted that she intended to throw herself from a bridge and gave the time and place. Not surprisingly, the police were on hand at the appointed hour and took her into protective custody. When her "husband," actually an out-of-work writer, appeared at the jail, a highly irate Gillars demanded to know why it had taken him so long to get there. Neither Gillars nor the writer, a man named

Ramsey, was paid for their respective performances ("Axis Sally" 2).

Gillars's career as a propagandist for the Third Reich proved infinitely more rewarding than her American acting career, however. "By 1943 Miss Gillars was the highest paid performer in the foreign broadcasting. She was making more than 3,000 marks a month" (Kennedy 1949). Her *Home Sweet Home* show was ostensibly intended to provide comfort to American troops stationed in North Africa. This excerpt from the aforementioned pre-Thanksgiving broadcast, though, indicates the true intent behind the veneer of ingratiation:

Hullo boys, here is your Home Sweet Home Programme. Well, Thanksgiving time has rolled around once again, hasn't it? A lot of water has gone under the bridge since our ancestors caught the first wild turkey over there on the rocky shores of the New England State [*sic*]; and when they took so much pains to free themselves from England, they never realised that their offspring would put on a uniform to go over and help England out. I think they'd turn over in their graves; perhaps they are. Maybe you'll be getting an S.O.S. call from your ancestors telling you to lay down arms and realise that England always was, is and will be our enemy. Get that through your hats, boys! Well, I think on Thanksgiving Day you'd like a little music which will remind you of home.⁴

Following this unsettling message, Gillars played a jazz composition and engaged in a joke-telling session with others in the studio.

Some of her GI listeners appreciated her musical selections and even her specious tone, but her taunting, especially with respect to the alleged infidelity of spouses and lovers back home, and her snide remarks regarding her audience's efforts at the front resulted in her show's being referred to in GI parlance as "Bitch at the Mike" (Bergmeier and Lotz 127).

Jane Anderson (aka the Marquesa de Cienfuegos, Lady Haw-Haw, and the Georgia Peach) was born on 6 January 1893 in Atlanta, Georgia. Before leaving the United States for the United Kingdom, she had established herself as a short-story writer and journalist in New York City. In London she acquired a position with Lord Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* and eventually was successful in gaining access to both H. G. Wells and Joseph Conrad. Anderson eventually made the acquaintance of a Spanish nobleman, the Marquis Alvarez de Cienfuegos, whom she subsequently married in Spain. The couple settled in that country, but their peace was shattered by the Spanish Civil War, which Jane elected to cover for the *Daily Mail*, following Franco's troops and documenting "the atrocities of the anti-Franco Loyalist troops [:] . . . defenseless prisoners brutally slaughtered, . . . rapes and crucifixions, and . . . unspeakable excesses against the church" (Edwards 49). She was eventually captured by Loyalist forces, imprisoned, and sentenced to death. According to a partially censored FBI report

dated 1 January 1943, "Being an American citizen, she was released on the eve of what she was told was to be her day of execution by intervention of the United States Secretary Cordell Hull."⁵ Her experience in Spanish prisons proved harrowing and contributed to her resolve to discredit her former captors. "Franco's champion initiated a full-scale propaganda campaign against her former jailers. Anderson warned of the menace of communism in global terms" (Edwards 50). Her efforts on behalf of Franco eventually earned her a position at the Spanish Ministry of Propaganda (Falangist). Two years of employment at the ministry brought her to the attention of the Reichrundfunk, which extended an invitation to her to join the staff. She accepted and made her first broadcast on 14 April 1941.

Anderson specialized in interviews—one of her most noteworthy was with William Joyce—and the Reich's status as a bulwark against Communism. In some ways she was one of the quirkiest broadcasters in the employ of the Reich. "The Georgia Peach's program began and ended with a ridiculous slogan for Kellogg's Corn Flakes, 'Always remember progressive Americans eat Kellogg's Corn Flakes and listen to both sides of the story.' The tune of 'Scatterbrain' provided background music for the segment" (Edwards 52). Her "scatterbrain" antics eventually succeeded in getting her fired, though. On 6 March 1942 she related to her American listeners how she and a male companion had recently entered a German tea shop, where she had consumed Turkish cakes and her friend had had an opportunity to quaff Champagne and cognac. This was done to give her audience the impression that all was well in wartime Germany, but her strategy backfired. The US Office of War Information cleverly decided to exploit her unrealized faux pas by broadcasting the marquesa's account of her night on the town to the Germans, who were coping with wartime privations. Her inadvertent aid to the Allies brought an end to her show.

With respect to celebrity, America's preeminent Axis-employed radio propagandist in the European theater was the poet Ezra Pound. Pound's employers were Fascist Italy and later Radio Milan of the German puppet state known as the Salò Republic. Pound began his broadcasts for the Italians in January 1941, speaking on a program called the *American Hour*. He wrote his own scripts but then had to secure the approval of the Ministry of Popular Culture before they could be broadcast. For his efforts he was paid approximately \$2,000 per year. Though ideologically committed to the cause of fascism, monetary compensation was one reason why Pound, who was perennially short of funds, offered to do the broadcasts. The broadcasts themselves were anti-American, anti-British, anti-Semitic, and rife with ad hominem attacks on Roosevelt and Churchill. Conversely, and not surprisingly, they were pro-Mussolini. Pound's status vis-à-vis "Il Duce" can aptly be described as that of groupie. He maintained a Mussolini scrapbook and once likened him to Thomas Jefferson. Mussolini could do no wrong in Pound's eyes (although the poet did cast aspersions on the dictator's

use of violence through his *squadristi*). Even after the fall of Italy, Pound could find it in his heart to exonerate Il Duce and attribute the failings of his regime to others. In his magnum opus—*The Cantos*—the poet indicts those others, quasi-incompetents and rogues:

and as to poor old Benito
 one had a safety-pin
 one had a bit of string, one had a button
 all of them so far beneath him
 half-baked and amateur
 or mere scoundrels (Pound, *Cantos* 515–16)

Pound was a strong proponent of the Social Credit movement, whose adherents sought economic reform consistent with the precepts of a theory advanced by C. F. Douglas, an industrial engineer with no formal training in economics. An explication of Douglas's theory is beyond the purview of this essay, but a serviceable yet succinct definition is provided by Pound and Spoo, who state that "Social Credit . . . holds that public purchasing power will always lag behind available goods and services, with consequences as dire as economic depression and wars, unless governments intervene to supply social credit in the form of a 'national dividend,' thus stimulating consumption and eliminating the need for bank loans and private moneylenders" (Pound, *Ezra and Dorothy* 52). Social Credit was underconsumptionist in nature and held interest rates to be highly pernicious.

Pound's elitism, commitment to Social Credit, preoccupation with alleged usurious practices, belief in an international Jewish conspiracy (Surette 240), and propensity to place his trust in great men contributed to his feelings of alienation with respect to the United States and the other Allied nations. Conversely, some of the aforementioned attributes contributed to his attraction to Fascist Italy; however, Pound's interest in that country predated the passage of its 1938 racial laws, and there is no reason to believe that Mussolini ever expressed an interest in Social Credit theory (Surette 67, 82). Though Mussolini failed to embrace Social Credit, Pound believed that his regime was nevertheless inimical to the interests of international banking.

Ezra Pound's radio role model was most likely William Joyce. According to Pound's mistress, Olga Rudge, a female acquaintance named Natalie Barney had presented him with a radio and suggested that he listen to some of the broadcasts of Lord Haw-Haw (Wilhelm 262). Pound must have been impressed with what he had heard because he subsequently wrote to Joyce to inquire into whether there was actually an audience for his broadcasts. "I go it blind, I have no idea if anyone listens" (Tiffany 287). He even sought advice from Haw-Haw: "Don't suppose you have time to listen [to my broadcasts], but shd/be glad to profit by experienced criticism" (Bergmeier and Lotz 75).

Torrey speculates that Pound may actually have met Joyce during the “silent period,” when the former inexplicably disappeared from the airwaves in mid-August 1942. In his correspondence with Joyce he expressed an interest in going to Germany if the costs were borne by the Reich (164).

Pound’s apprehensions with respect to his audience are understandable. It is difficult to imagine the average GI enthusiastically tuning in to broadcasts by a man who spoke in a whine, frequently prefaced his commentary with Italian operatic selections and dated dance tunes (Pound, *Ezra and Dorothy* 2), and conveyed the impression of being a cracker-barrel crank. This excerpt from his 18 February 1943 broadcast might be compared with the Chandler excerpt above. There are thematic similarities, to be sure, but the tone is markedly different:

Don’t shoot him. Don’t shoot him. Don’t shoot the President. I dare say he deserves worse, but don’t shoot him. Assassination only makes more mess, as fer [sic] example in the case of Darlan [Jean-François Darlan, supreme commander of Vichy French forces]. And Hank Wallace [Henry A. Wallace, thirty-third vice president of the United States]. . . ? Frankfurter [associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court] can feed hot air to Wallace just as fast as he feeds it to Frankie [FDR], probably faster.

What you can do is to understand just how the President is an imbecile. I mean that, learn JUST how, in what way he is a dumb cluck, a goof, a two fisted double time liar. (Pound, *Ezra Pound* 221)

Pound’s final radio script was never broadcast. It was prepared in 1945, after he had been taken into custody by the US Counter Intelligence Corps. He entitled it “Ashes of Europe Calling,” which was an allusion to his “Europe callin’, Ezra Pound speakin’” on-the-air salutation. “Ashes” admonishes the victors to exercise restraint with respect to defeated Germany, calls for American management of Italian affairs “until . . . the Italians can elect a government . . . chosen on basis of personal honesty, not on capacity to diddle the other fellow, or on political theory” (Pound, *Ezra and Dorothy* 53), and asserts that he is in favor of peace with Japan and that “modern japanese [sic] business vulgarity & aggressiveness can best be beaten by 2500 years of japanese [sic] civilization” (Pound, *Ezra and Dorothy* 55). He also makes an incongruous statement with respect to Jews: “Jews—I believe in Palestine for the jews [sic] as a national home & symbol of jewry—not merely as a real estate speculation—zionism [sic] against international finance” (Pound, *Ezra and Dorothy* 55).

The Georgia Peach, Dr. Anders, Paul Revere, Mr. Guess Who, and even Axis Sally and Lord Haw-Haw all faded from America’s collective consciousness; Pound was probably never there to begin with but is remembered today as a poet, not a propagandist. The one propagandist who apparently did not fade from that consciousness was the one that never really existed—Tokyo Rose.

Tokyo Rose was a faceless, sultry-voiced siren, hovering over the Pacific spinning tunes and predicting doom, but she was no more than a myth. No propagandist for the Japanese ever used the name "Tokyo Rose." The moniker, however, adhered itself to a patriotic Japanese-American woman who naively believed that she would reap a bonanza of sorts by appropriating it but ended up with a stiff prison sentence instead. Her name was Iva Toguri.

In July 1941 Toguri, a graduate of the University of California, Los Angeles, left the United States without a passport to visit a sick aunt in Japan. She departed with a certificate of identity and had been instructed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service to retrieve her passport at the American consulate in Yokohama. Toguri arrived in Japan unable to read the language and with a strong aversion to rice, the Japanese staple. She also soon discovered that she was unable to leave: American-Japanese relations were deteriorating, Pearl Harbor was in the offing, and her American passport was not forthcoming. As an American woman of Japanese ancestry in wartime Japan, it would have been expedient for her to have succumbed to the admonishments of Japan's version of the Gestapo, the Tokkò Keisatsu, and to have become a Japanese citizen, but she refused.

Eventually circumstances forced her to take a job as a typist at Nippon Hoso Kyoki (NHK), Radio Japan. There she was selected by an Australian named Charles Cousens, a prisoner of war and professional broadcaster, who recruited her for a show entitled *Zero Hour*. Iva was an unusual choice for such a position: with the exception of her native-English-speaker status, there was nothing that would qualify her to sit behind the microphone. She had no experience in broadcasting, and her voice was extremely unpleasant. Furthermore, there were other women at NHK who were infinitely more suitable, Ruth Hayakawa, for instance, who was both a native speaker of English and a professional broadcaster with a sexy voice. Nevertheless, there was method in Cousens's madness. His intention was to create a burlesque that would be perceptible to Iva's GI listeners but go unnoticed by her Japanese employers.

To flesh out his parody, Cousens employed a number of techniques. Howe relates how he would have Iva address her audience as "honorable boneheads," deliberately mispronounce words, and occasionally make reference to herself as "your favorite enemy, Ann" (49). Even her on-air persona—Ann—was a travesty. Australian troops in the Pacific referred to themselves as "orphans." Cousens assumed that GIs there utilized the same self-designation and suggested that Iva combine the word used to express the metaphorical status of the Australian troops cut off from their Allies with her script line-designation, the abbreviation *Ann.*, for *announcer*, to produce "Orphan Ann," which would serve to signal her solidarity with her listeners (Howe 49). The pseudonym was, of course, remarkably similar to the name of the famous American cartoon character Little Orphan Annie, but the slight difference created a comic effect. On a more seri-

ous note, Cousens would have Iva perform a "wipe," which consisted of absurd repetitions of the words "thank you," following the reading by another broadcaster of news that might prove demoralizing to her audience (Howe 50). A script that illustrates some of the aforementioned techniques is this one cited by Howe and dated 3 May 1944 (?):

Ann: Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you. Greetings everybody! This is Ann of Radio Tokyo, the little orphan girl, presenting our special program for . . . that large but not over-intelligent family, the Orphans of the South Pacific. . . . Orphan to Orphan, over!

[Plays musical selection.]

Ann: Okay, we're off! Now, here's some music that's easy on the ear.

Bajes Bela and orchestra in a Franz Lehar fantasia [hardly likely to appeal to the average GI]. Relax, little boneheads, and please to listening! (Howe 201)

Later in the same broadcast she plays Schubert's "Serenade" and exhorts her bonehead listeners to raise their "onable voice in harmony" (Howe 201).

The postwar denouements of the expatriate-propagandist sagas are as interesting as the broadcasters' wartime careers and as disturbing as some of their messages. The Joyce and Toguri cases in particular lend credence to Clark's pithy observation that "justice is the fugitive from the winning camp" (Howe viii). Well-connected propagandists in both the United States and Great Britain fared much better (with one exception) than their unexalted counterparts. For the former there were apologists, well connected and famous, who were willing to take up their cause and proffer excuses for their friends' wartime activities. For many in the latter category there were trials and prison sentences.

After their postwar arrests Chandler and Best were placed on the same flight back to the United States—destination Washington, DC—but their aircraft experienced engine trouble and was forced to land in Chicopee, Massachusetts. As American law specifies that the trial of a person indicted for the crime of treason if committed outside the United States must be tried in the district into which he first arrives, the venue for the Chandler and Best trial (they were codefendants) was Boston, Massachusetts, the home of the American icon Paul Revere.

Chandler was convicted of treason and sentenced to life in prison. He was incarcerated at Lewisburg Penitentiary, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, for sixteen years but was pardoned by President John F. Kennedy in August 1963.

Best, like Chandler, was sentenced to life imprisonment but suffered a cerebral hemorrhage during his incarceration. He expired at the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners, Springfield, Missouri, on 16 December 1952.

The professorial Anders did not survive the war. Koischwitz died on 31 August 1944. The cause of death was given as heart failure and tuberculosis.

After the war Gillars was arrested, tried, and convicted. She served twelve years at the Federal Reformatory for Women, Alderson, West Virginia, before being paroled on 10 July 1961. A document released by the Department of Justice on 7 April 1961 reveals that her postprison life would be under scrutiny for nearly two decades:

Mr. Chappell [chairman of the United States Board of Parole] said that Miss Gillars will be supervised by a Federal officer until her 30 year term expires in 1979.

"A plan for community life has been developed by her and investigated by a Federal official," Mr. Chappell said. "This plan, which consists of employment in a convent, will meet her need for constructive activities."⁶

Gillars died in Columbus, Ohio, on 25 June 1988.

The quirky Georgia Peach was shielded by marriage. Anderson's Spanish citizenship was instrumental in the Justice Department's decision not to prosecute her. At war's end, she returned with her husband to Spain.

After the war Iva Toguri tragically appropriated the name "Tokyo Rose" when she was offered \$2,000 for an exclusive interview by two reporters working for Hearst publications, Harry Brundidge and Clark Lee, of *Cosmopolitan* and *International News Service*, respectively (Howe 67). She never received the money, but for a time at least she enjoyed celebrity status among the GIs in occupied Japan. Eventually Toguri was investigated by the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), which determined that she was innocent. Howe cites a CIC report of 17 April that accurately and succinctly describes her wartime predicament and activities: "She was stranded in Japan, tried vainly to return . . . , had to work to survive, joined Tokyo radio, found her work distasteful, but joined with Allied prisoners . . . there to water down the propaganda content of the broadcasts" (89). This exoneration did not put an end to Iva's travails, though. When she once again attempted to secure her passport, American Legion commander James F. O'Neill demanded that she be prosecuted (Howe 118). Walter Winchell, whose endeavors could hardly be termed a paradigm of journalistic excellence, helped to orchestrate a hue and cry among the hoi polloi, and Iva was eventually and tragically brought to trial on 5 July 1949 in San Francisco. There were a number of irregularities, including perjury, associated with the trial, but these are beyond the purview of this essay. Interested readers may consult Howe's extensive treatment of the subject in *The Hunt for "Tokyo Rose."* Suffice it to say that Iva was convicted, sentenced to ten years in prison, and fined \$10,000. She served a little over six years in the Federal Reformatory for Women at Alderson, West Virginia. On 18 January 1977 she was officially pardoned by President Gerald Ford.

An examination of the treatment accorded Joyce vis-à-vis that accorded his well-connected colleagues in the United Kingdom should prove informative, a

transatlantic comparison involving Joyce and Pound even more so. The aforementioned link between the two propagandists, their homologous wartime roles, and the extreme divergence with respect to their postwar predicaments make a juxtaposition of the two nearly imperative. The former was hanged; the latter ensconced himself in a mental hospital.

William Joyce was executed at Wandsworth prison on 3 January 1946 for the crime of high treason. Perhaps few would find any of this remarkable were it not for the fact that, as stated earlier, the man convicted of treachery against the British Crown was not British.

In 1995 the British Home Office released a number of documents related to the Joyce case. Included among these is a report from MI-5, the British security and counterespionage service, that asserts "at all material times he was a British subject for the reasons given later in this report."⁷ The reasons proffered by MI-5 are his application for a British passport, to which he was not entitled, and two subsequent renewals of the fraudulently obtained passport. "In all three documents . . . Joyce describes himself as a British subject by birth though born in Galway, Ireland."⁸ This, the penultimate sentence of section 15 of the report, is astonishing, for it seems to imply that British nationality can be acquired through a process of self-proclamation. He states that he is British; therefore he is.

Joyce obtained his British passport on 4 July 1933, initially for the purpose of accompanying Sir Oswald Mosley on an overseas trip for a meeting with Adolf Hitler. As a member of Mosley's British Union of Fascists and as someone who, for a number of years at least, clearly saw himself as British, it is hardly surprising that Joyce would lay claim at the Passport Office to being "a British subject by birth."⁹ In those days applicants were not required to furnish a birth certificate to substantiate statements made on the application; an endorsement from a public official was all that was needed. Joyce was able to acquire the requisite endorsement from a Mr. Costello, an accountant at the National Bank in Grosvenor Gardens, and the passport was issued.

Also included among the recently released documents are a number of letters expressing opinions from people who were averse to the government's decision to execute Joyce. Two deserve mention here.

In a letter to King George VI, dated 25 December 1945, an accountant named Edgar Bray writes:

I know nothing about Joyce, and nothing about his Politics. I dont [sic] know much about Law either, but I do know enough to be firmly convinced that we are proposing to hang Joyce *for the crime of pretending to be an Englishman* which crime, so far as I am aware, in no possible case carries a Capital penalty.¹⁰

In prose as simple as it is cogent, Mr. Bray makes the following points: "It happens to be just our bad luck, that Joyce actually WAS an American, (and now IS

a German subject), but that is no reason to hang him, because we are annoyed at our bad luck."¹¹

The second letter of note is addressed to "His Britannic Majesty's House of Lords" and to "The Lord Chancellor and the Home Secretary."¹² It, too, is dated 25 December 1945. The writer is one Wladyslaw the Fifth, a man claiming, somewhat implausibly, to be "KING OF POLAND, HUNGARY and BOHEMIA, GRAND DUKE OF LITHUANIA, SILESIA, and THE UKRAINE, HOSPODAR OF MOLDAVIA, etc. etc. etc."¹³ According to Randall J. Dicks, governor of the Constantian Society, an organization dedicated to the study of monarchs and monarchies, "There is no heir to the Polish throne."¹⁴ Lady Diana Mosley (nee Mitford), widow of Sir Oswald Mosley, sheds additional light on the "Hospodar of Moldavia, etc., etc. etc.": "The King of Poland was a joke figure before the war. He was oddly dressed, cloak I think. He was a sort of harmless lunatic who went to political meetings. I never made his acquaintance."¹⁵

The spuriousness of Wladyslaw's claims and the tone and much of the content of his letter could easily lead one to dismiss his missive as simply the effusions of an eccentric crank or the ravings of a Nazi sympathizer except for the fact that in it he squarely places the blame for the Katyn massacre (April-May 1940) on the Soviets, more than half a decade before a US congressional investigation found the Soviets responsible and many years before the Soviet government assumed responsibility for it:

In particular there is the murder at Katyn of about ten thousand Polish officers, policemen and doctors, which is before the so-called Court in Germany as having been committed by the Germans, whereas the Government of England and a very large number of influential people in England are fully aware that this vile murder was not and could not have been committed by the Germans but was done by the Bolsheviks, already famous for analogous crimes.¹⁶

The eccentric Wladyslaw demands that Joyce be kept alive until "the whole matter of the Katyn massacres shall have been properly and justly investigated and the Governments and persons responsible therefor duly brought to justice and punished."¹⁷

Though a tragedy for the Poles, the Katyn massacre was viewed by Goebbels as a propaganda bonanza, for he saw it as having the potential to be a divisive issue in the Allied camp, an opportunity for Germany to drive a wedge between the Roosevelt-Churchill camp, on the one hand, and that of Stalin, on the other. The Allies chose to ignore the evidence, and Goebbels's propaganda windfall failed to materialize. However, considering the importance that Goebbels had attached to the Katyn massacre and the fact that Joyce was employed by his ministry, it is not inconceivable that the latter might have been able to shed some light on the murders at Katyn. Nevertheless, Joyce was executed.

On the morning of the execution approximately three hundred people—both friends and foes—gathered outside of Wandsworth prison awaiting the official pronouncement of his death, the “Declaration of Sheriff and Others.” In the crowd was a middle-aged “mystery woman” dressed in black who when asked by a reporter for the *Evening News* whether she had some special interest in William Joyce replied, “There are a lot of things for which you cannot give an explanation.”¹⁸ At first blush or to those only superficially familiar with Joyce and the events that occurred in the years immediately following World War II, this may appear to be an apt response. An *alien* is convicted of treason against a country in which he did *not* reside when the alleged treachery occurred and is subsequently hanged. Furthermore, the act of “treason” in this case is not the result of espionage, sabotage, or military aggression, but rather the consequence of opinions expressed over the radio. This curious (a more appropriate word might be *anomalous*) case appears to be inexplicable. However, an examination of the treatment accorded some of Joyce’s well-connected propagandist-collaborationist colleagues suggests an answer as simple as it is disturbing.

Joyce’s name is often linked with that of a colleague, John Amery, the rabidly anti-Communist son of Leopold Amery, Conservative politician and a former First Lord of the Admiralty. In addition to his broadcasting activities, Amery was engaged in organizing an exceedingly small military unit consisting of British prisoners of war, the Legion of St. George, later called the British Free Corps. According to Grigg, the Corps reached its peak in January 1945, when membership climbed to a meager twenty-seven (38). Amery, like Joyce, was hanged. However, Amery’s efforts at conscription for the Third Reich, no matter how ineffective or seemingly innocuous, come far closer to most people’s definition of treason than the acts that brought Joyce to the gallows.

Despite the denouement of the Amery story, he seems to have evoked the sympathies of a number of rather important people, some of whom were prepared to take extraordinary steps to help him avoid his fate. In 1995 the Home Office also released documents related to Amery. Ward asserts that a Dr. Edward Glover launched a campaign aimed at securing clemency for John. He sent an eleventh-hour missive to Lord Stansgate, a high-ranking minister, arguing against the execution on the ground of insanity: “I know, in soul and conscience, that a man may be hanged tomorrow whom five of the of the [sic] foremost psychiatrists in Britain and the King’s physician . . . have reason to know is mentally disordered” (8).

The insanity evidence was “buttressed” by the assertions of a number of individuals—hardly disinterested parties, however—who appeared to equate the most pedestrian peccadilloes with derangement. His former headmaster claimed that John’s naughty behavior had always appeared meaningless to him. His wife and a former doctor accused him of being a pervert and a heavy drinker. And his father related that his son had had a venereal disease and was preoccupied with sex (Ward 8).

John Amery was not the only well-connected expatriate celebrity in the employ of the Third Reich. P. G. Wodehouse, the British novelist who created Bertie Wooster and Jeeves, did five talks for the Reich that were subsequently beamed to Britain. After the broadcasts he and his wife, Ethel, were moved from an internment camp to Berlin's elegant Adlon Hotel. Later they moved to the Hotel Bristol in Paris, where they were residing when DeGaulle established his government and the United Kingdom reopened its embassy. Duff Cooper, Britain's ambassador, discovered that he was residing beside the Wodehouses at the Bristol and contacted MI-5, which launched an investigation (Cusick 14).

Despite Wodehouse's activities, the Churchill government was apprehensive about the prospects of a future treason trial and sought to avert that possibility. Writing after the release of Public Record Office documents related to the case, Cusick asserts that "the British authorities . . . began a series of manoeuvres to ensure they never faced putting Wodehouse in the dock" (14).

Wodehouse also had the support of at least one member of the British community of letters, George Orwell, who wrote a thirteen-page defense of the propagandist entitled "In Defense of P. G. Wodehouse." Orwell argues that as the war progressed, "British morale depended largely upon the feeling that this was not only a war for democracy but a war which the common people had to win by their own efforts" (327). There was a conflation of patriotism and left-wing sentiment, as the upper classes were identified with the appeasement policy that preceded the outbreak of hostilities. In this highly charged atmosphere, the wealthy "Wodehouse made an ideal whipping boy" (Orwell 327).

Wodehouse was not tried, and Orwell's "whipping boy" received a knighthood. He lived to the hoary age of ninety-three. Joyce was hanged.

Any comparison of the predicaments of the British (intended here to include Joyce) and American Axis-employed propagandists is necessarily constrained by the fact that two systems of jurisprudence and two cultures were involved in determining their fates. Nevertheless, a disturbing pattern can be discerned if one considers the treatment accorded Ezra Pound, the American celebrity propagandist, in light of what was rendered to the less-famous American propagandists, a pattern that has its transatlantic counterpart in the Wodehouse-Joyce dichotomy. Such an undertaking will, it is to be hoped, shed some light on the dynamism at work at the time of the trials and the disparate punishments that arose therefrom.

Pound's arrest in 1945 was an occurrence that galvanized an old-boy network of unprecedented proportions. Acting on an idea originally proposed by Ernest Hemingway that Pound plead insanity in the face of an indictment for treason, the literati (e.g., Hemingway, Archibald MacLeish [poet and assistant secretary of state], James Laughlin [owner of *New Directions*], Merrill Moore [psychiatrist and poet]) around the former propagandist pursued their goal—

helping him avoid a lengthy prison sentence or, worse, execution—with an intensity of purpose that eventually achieved the desired result. That this was an organized effort, there can be little doubt. Even the FBI strongly suspected that this was the case. Torrey notes that one of Pound's supporters had told the agency that "he, as well as any acquaintances of Pound's, should they be called to testify, probably all would state that they believed he has become mentally unbalanced" (183). It is also clear that few if any of the major "insanity proponents" believed that Pound was truly insane. Torrey quotes MacLeish as saying later that he "never thought Ezra was insane unless a ludicrous egotism qualifies." (182) and relates how Laughlin professed his belief in Pound's sanity to T. S. Eliot, "but allowing him [Pound] to go to trial would be dangerous; a plea of insanity was the safest way of avoiding it" (183).

Inevitably, comparisons were drawn between Pound and his German-employed counterpart, Joyce. The analogies must have been profoundly disturbing to Pound's supporters, as is evidenced by the fact that Hemingway launched a campaign to separate the two cases, arguing, quite preposterously considering the nationality issue, that Joyce was a bona fide traitor, while Pound was merely "a silly . . . crazy . . . and harmless traitor" (Torrey 199–200).

The three psychiatrists representing the US government during the Pound proceedings were Drs. Overholser, King, and Gilbert. Overholser was a well-respected Harvard graduate and close friend of Merrill Moore. He was also an ardent admirer of Pound: "Dr. Overholser appreciated Pound's literary achievements; as he phrased it, 'Pound was a person of eminent standing in the field of letters'" (Torrey 190). It could hardly be said that Overholser was a disinterested party. He was also known to have maintained meticulous files during his tenure at St. Elizabeth's (the mental hospital where Pound was incarcerated), except concerning Ezra Pound. Torrey notes that Overholser's more than twelve-year involvement with his patient left a virtually nonexistent legacy. His copious records are repositied at both the Library of Congress and the National Archives, but hardly a mention is made of his celebrity charge (189).

In short, the treason trial never materialized because Pound was found to be insane and unfit to stand trial. Instead, as implied earlier, he was committed to St. Elizabeth's, where he remained for twelve and a half years. Pound's years at the mental hospital can best be described as highly productive: he composed *Section: Rock Drill* and most of *Thrones* there. His social life cannot be said to have suffered from his incarceration either, as he entertained an array of intellectual visitors ranging from T. S. Eliot to Marshall McLuhan. Finally, the period of Pound's incarceration was financially rewarding. Torrey cites "hospital records [that] show that his personal expenditures for the fiscal year from October 1954 through September 1955 were only \$1,593.62. . . . At the time he had saved over \$13,000" (243), a sizeable sum for a person who had had perennial financial problems.

Notwithstanding the relatively comfortable circumstances surrounding his incarceration, Pound's friends made another attempt to alleviate his "plight." This time the goal was to secure an early release for the poet and the vehicle chosen was a prize, albeit one that did not yet exist—the Bollingen Award. The strategy in a sense pitted one branch of government against another. The Library of Congress via a board of literary luminaries, many of them Pound's friends, would confer a national prize for poetry on a preordained recipient—Ezra Pound—and by so doing obliquely pressure the Department of Justice to consider Pound's case in a different light (Torrey 234–35). The Mellon-financed Bollingen Foundation would then present the recipient with a \$1,000 prize. Pound received it for his *Pisan Cantos*. The dedicated efforts of his friends eventually secured his release in April 1958, shortly after which he departed for Italy, where he once again took up residence.

None of the noncelebrity American propagandists mentioned earlier suffered a fate as extreme as that of Joyce, though Iva Toguri's treatment came fairly close. However, none of those who were prosecuted experienced the comfortable incarceration of Pound either.

It is difficult to say that justice was served in the case of William Joyce. With the exception of the execution itself, perhaps the only thing the convoluted arguments regarding nationality and allegiance served to accomplish was to turn a man with unsavory political views into a martyr among people whose politics are equally unsavory. The success of the assorted defenses, apologies, and, in the case of Ezra Pound, ruses employed on behalf of the well-connected expatriate Axis-employed propagandists (with the exception, of course, of John Amery) by their articulate, well-heeled, and savvy defenders underscores the importance of possessing clout. The relatively happy denouements with respect to the well-connected celebrity propagandists when juxtaposed with the tragic outcomes vis-à-vis those of many of the "noncelebrities," especially the severity of the punishment meted out to Joyce and the judicial travesty inflicted upon Toguri, have sullied the reputations of the legal systems of the United Kingdom and the United States and tainted all the postwar propagandist trials with the quality that is the antithesis of the Anglo-American concept of jurisprudence—bias. Equally disturbing is the fact that all of the propagandists, with the exception of Amery, did nothing more than exercise the right of free speech, a practice protected in the United States by the First Amendment.

The severity of the sentences inflicted upon those bereft of the services of powerful protectors can be seen also as oblique evidence of the power of the spoken word and the medium of radio. In his highly informative introduction to Russell Warren Howe's *The Hunt for "Tokyo Rose,"* former US attorney general Ramsey Clark notes that of all the Americans who participated in the Second World War only twelve were indicted for treason. Seven of those twelve were radio announcers (Howe viii).

Notes

1. Federal Bureau of Investigation, 26 Apr. 1945, transcripts of Douglas Chandler's broadcasts, National Archives and Records Administration, FBI Headquarters Files, IC 100-32785-131.
2. N. A. Doellinger, 16 June 1943, transcript of shortwave broadcast, National Archives and Records Administration, FBI Headquarters Files, IC 100-163780, FCC Record 51207.
3. Lawley, 18 Nov. 1943, transcripts of Gillars's broadcasts, National Archives and Records Administration, FBI Headquarters Files, IC 100-232559-1.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1 Jan. 1943, file pertaining to Jane Anderson. National Archives and Records Administration, FBI Headquarters Files, IC 100-10125.
6. Department of Justice, 7 Apr. 1961, file pertaining to Mildred Gillars, National Archives and Records Administration, FBI Headquarters Files, IC 100-232559-A.
7. MI-5, 13 June 1945, report on William Joyce, Public Record Office, File HO45/25780, 62.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Edgar Bray, 25 Dec. 1945, letter to King George VI, Public Record Office, File HO45/22405, 530.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Wladyslaw the Fifth, 25 Dec. 1945, letter to House of Lords, Lord Chancellor, and Home Secretary, Public Record Office, File HO45/22406, 201-2.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Randall Dicks, 14 Sept. 1995, letter to the author.
15. Diana Mosley, 23 Sept. 1996, letter to the author.
16. Wladyslaw, 201-2.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Evening News*, undated, newspaper clipping, Public Record Office, File HO45/22405, 59.

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CHAPTER 14**NOW IT CAN BE TOLD****The Influence of the United States Occupation
on Japanese Radio**

Susan Smulyan

MANY HISTORIES OF THE ALLIED OCCUPATION of Japan after World War II begin with a radio story. On 15 August 1945 Emperor Hirohito went on the air to personally inform the Japanese people of Japan's surrender. In his statement, carefully crafted to avoid arousing either resistance or panic, the emperor spoke directly to his subjects for the first time. The statement was replayed throughout the day, often with news readers substituting for the emperor, whom his subjects found difficult to understand (NHK 128–32). Japanese film director Masahiro Shinoda begins his 1984 autobiographical film, *MacArthur's Children*, by showing his villager characters reacting to the emperor's broadcast. Accounts of Japanese listening to the radio helped familiarize Americans with a former enemy and showed radio's importance to everyday life. In addition, the emperor's use of the radio to reach individual Japanese highlighted the occupation's goal of reconfiguring Japanese society by "teaching democracy" through a range of media and cultural forms.

From the beginning of the occupation the Allied authorities believed in the importance of radio to their mission. But the complexity of the Allied occupation, with its forced interaction between former enemies, its intercultural clashes, and its simultaneously lofty and vengeful ideals make what happened to Japanese radio difficult to untangle.¹ An examination of the radio policy and activities of the Allied occupation perhaps best illustrates what Americans unself-consciously believed about their own broadcasting system. The juxtaposition of commercial US broadcasting with government-supported Japanese broadcast-

ing certainly shows the anomalies inherent in each system. Looking at radio during the occupation may also raise questions about the ways in which radio is different from other media.

In revamping Japan's radio system, the occupation forces balanced three sometimes conflicting impulses: the need to use broadcasting for propaganda purposes, an American preference for commercialized broadcasting, and the mandate to "teach democracy" to the Japanese. The Americans needed to continue the noncommercial, centralized broadcasting system found in Japan in order to control the flow of information and propaganda for occupation purposes, but they firmly believed that only a commercial system was modern and democratic. The clashes among the three aims of propaganda, commercialization, and democracy can best be seen in the contradictory actions of the occupation forces supervising Japanese broadcasting. Americans controlled Japanese radio—from writing individual programs to dictating how radio stations were run—yet instituted listener surveys to find out what ordinary Japanese wanted. By the end of the occupation those in charge of radio had resolved the contradictions by considering the "teaching of democracy" not as propaganda but as part of the civic duty of a broadcasting system, and by thinking of democracy itself in commodified terms.

Radio played an important part in World War II. The radio systems of the countries at war kept people informed of what was going on and served, especially for the Axis but for Allied countries as well, as crucial propaganda outlets. American respect for the efficacy of Axis radio propaganda led to the founding of the Office of War Information and the Voice of America to present Allied propaganda to countries occupied by the Nazis. The broadcasts of Japanese propagandists such as "Tokyo Rose" while not particularly damaging to the morale of American troops, infuriated American officials and contributed to the widely held notion that radio was an important propaganda tool (Kasawa; Daniels; Shulman).

When General Douglas MacArthur landed in Japan in September 1945, plans had already been made for an "indirect" occupation, with the Supreme Command Allied Powers (SCAP) working through Japanese institutions to run the country and reform society and culture. Early planning documents described the Japanese radio system in great detail, noting that all broadcasting stations were owned and operated by the Broadcasting Corporation of Japan (Nippon Hoso Kyokai, or NHK), a government entity.² Within SCAP, the Council of Information and Education (CIE) included a Radio Unit (also later called the Radio Branch) which would work with NHK to provide:

- an orderly and professional presentation of four types of materials: (1) complete information on occupation objectives and directives, (2) accurate and well-balanced news service, (3) comment by qualified

observers on matters of national importance and (4) such educational, cultural and entertainment matters as might be suggested by listeners' polls.³

The clashing imperatives were apparent early, as Japanese listeners would probably not choose to listen to occupation directives.

Within weeks of the formal surrender, the Japanese sent SCAP a memo outlining a new mixed system of broadcasting that included the government-sponsored NHK network as well as commercial stations. The Japanese believed that the Americans, who held most of the power within SCAP, would want to install a commercialized broadcasting system (History Compilation Room 152). But SCAP didn't reply until December and then directed a reorganization of NHK without mentioning commercial stations. The so-called Hanner memorandum from SCAP contained plans for a single, monopolistic broadcasting system, the NHK. Historian Yoshimi Uchikawa suggests that the occupation forces sought the continuance of NHK to "facilitate occupational control" (59). The CIE Radio Branch often reported that the Japanese economy was not ready to support commercial stations, but also noted that a "single nationwide radio system" was "ideally suited for the dissemination of propaganda" (Uchikawa 169–71). Not until late in the occupation, during the negotiations over Japan's new Radio Laws, would SCAP permit the beginnings of a commercialized system (Uchikawa 68; NHK 169–71). The lack of commercial stations did not keep the Radio Branch of the CIE from imposing commercial ideas on the NHK.

If the earliest radio policy of the occupation moved uneasily among propaganda, commercialization, and democracy, the first impulse of the Allied officers in charge of radio was toward the ultimate form of control—censorship. The Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) undertook censorship duties for all Japanese media during the occupation. Planning for censorship of "civil communications" began early and included both subjects to be banned and careful consideration of precensorship (Mayo, "American" 27–31). According to Jun Eto, SCAP censorship was thorough, in violation of both the Potsdam Declaration and the Japanese constitution, and hidden from the Japanese people, as the censorship process forbade any mention of itself in any media. In their excellent article "American Occupation Control over Broadcasting in Japan," Catherine Luther and Douglas Boyd point out the contradictions inherent in the censorship policy and the "extreme" controls over broadcasting exercised by occupation personnel, particularly those in the CIE and the CCD. At first moved by fear and distrust of the Japanese and later by fear and distrust of Communism, occupation officials used censorship and other forms of control to ensure that broadcasts hewed to a single line. While ostensibly moving to make Japanese broadcasting system more democratic, SCAP officials tightly controlled what was heard on the radio. Luther and Boyd retell a wonderful story (first

published in an article in Japanese by Eiki Kogo) of Japanese media officials apologizing that government censorship had contributed to wartime fervor and kept democracy from flourishing and SCAP officials angrily replying that *they* intended to censor broadcast programming in order to promote democracy (Luther and Boyd 44–45; Mayo, “War of Words” 52). NHK provided scripts to the CCD before broadcast; CCD censors reviewed them carefully and then monitored broadcasts for compliance.

Both the CIE and the CCD worked to control radio broadcasting, with the CCD eliminating “anti-democratic thoughts” while the CIE promoted “democratic ideas through its influence on broadcast programming” (Luther and Boyd 43). The CCD’s censorship activities required a centralized broadcasting entity, while the CIE’s activities, because they dealt with programming and so triggered comparisons with American broadcasting, raised the idea that a commercial and decentralized system of broadcasting would be more democratic.

The uneasy coexistence among propaganda, commercialization, and democracy can best be seen in the work of the CIE. Of all their projects, the CIE’s effort to train Japanese broadcasters in modern radio techniques seemingly succeeded only in a centralized, tightly controlled, and undemocratic system. Yet even this training program proceeded from the twin beliefs that Japanese broadcasting was not “responsive to the listeners” in the way of commercialized systems and that exposing Japanese broadcasters to American commercial radio would show them the error of government-sponsored broadcasting.

Throughout the occupation the CIE believed that Japanese broadcasters had few skills and poor preparation. One 1948 CIE report noted that “the Japanese are still ignorant of many basic radio techniques,” and training continued on several fronts, including having materials sent from the United States, holding workshops in Japan with materials prepared specifically for Japanese broadcasters, and sponsoring trips by Japanese broadcasters to the United States to observe American broadcasting.⁴

The CIE’s training methods usually ignored the fact that Japanese broadcasters had run a broadcasting system since 1925 and had successfully used radio for propaganda purposes among their own population during the war (Daniels; NHK; History Compilation Room; Kasza). The Americans’ distorted view of Japanese radio before the occupation stemmed from racist ethnocentrism and from a firm belief that the work of the occupation was truth, not propaganda. But occupation officials also used the excuse that the Japanese knew nothing about a truly democratic radio system, one that was free of government controls and democratic in seeking listener requests—in other words, a commercialized system.

The training that took place in Japan began with the idea that the CIE knew the proper way to do every task needed to run a broadcasting station and that the Japanese lacked even the most basic understanding of how radio operated. Control of Japanese broadcasting would extend to the kind of hand signals used

in NHK studios. The CIE prepared and offered an eight-lecture series, "Basic Principles of Broadcasting," which included "Cues," "Timing the Program," "Casting," "Pre-Rehearsal Conference," "First Cast Rehearsal," "Mike Rehearsal," and "Dress Rehearsal." The first lecture included definitions of such terms as *producer*, *director*, and *production-director*, as well as providing visual aids for fourteen hand signals.⁵ The lecture series only began the training offered to Japanese broadcasters. Graduate courses would take place in the United States.

In 1949 the CIE sent six Japanese employees of NHK to Paul Lazarsfeld's Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University to study American radio, but complained that the university had arranged a program that focused on educational rather than commercial broadcasting. The Japanese delegation, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, followed a course similar to one offered German broadcasters the previous year. The Japanese broadcasters spent five weeks at Columbia and several months visiting radio stations.⁶ A sheaf of correspondence between Columbia and CIE failed to produce a training program that met with the approval of the officer in charge of the CIE Radio Branch, Dwight Herrick. While the visit was in progress, Herrick wrote to one of the Japanese broadcasters, Jiro Nanye, "that educational radio has had a great deal of stress during the time you have been in the States and . . . this is only a small part of American radio and a relatively unimportant operation when compared to local stations and network commercial broadcasting."⁷ In his final report on the program, Herrick was scornful of the instructors (who included Herta Herzog, Charles Siepmann, Werner Michel, Erik Barnouw, and Robert Saudek) because of the lack of "top-flight American network representatives." Herrick noted that the six Japanese fellows felt "educational work was overstressed" and that this was "largely a waste of time since their specific interests were not in the educational field, but in network programming, news, production and administration."⁸ Lazarsfeld presented a course for broadcasters working either within a governmental system or in a system with the "proper" balance between commercialism and education, while the CIE believed NHK broadcasters needed instruction in the potentialities of a commercial system.

In the beginning of their broadcast programming work, the CIE attempted to control what went over the air, even to writing propaganda programs, while later they tried to influence NHK programmers to use commercial tactics to make Japanese radio more democratic. One infamous example of unwanted propaganda, *Now It Can Be Told*, was broadcast in ten weekly segments beginning in December 1945. The program, written and produced by the CIE, aimed to tell the Japanese people the truth about the events of the war and, perhaps more importantly, to persuade them to believe the CIE's version of the events. As Marlene Mayo has persuasively noted, *Now It Can Be Told* was a key part of SCAP's and the CIE's larger goal of "programming for war guilt." The CIE's mission, as defined by SCAP, included explaining to "the Japanese public the true facts of

their defeat, their war guilt, the responsibility of the militarists for present and future Japanese suffering and privation and the reasons for and objects of the military occupation by the Allied powers" (Mayo, "War of Words" 57).

Now It Can Be Told sought to do more than simply present facts. The CIE wanted to use radio to persuade the Japanese of the occupation's truthfulness. When the program ended, it was replaced by a question-and-answer program entitled *The Truth Box*. The CIE used American-style scriptwriting and promotion to insinuate the program's message into the Japanese psyche, much as if it were a commercial product. US programs, through interpolated advertising and programming that promoted consumption, sold both particular products and a way of life. CIE officials sold "democracy" rather than "consumption" and believed occupation radio programs could promote specific ideas as well as a new way of seeing.

Despite the fact that *Now It Can Be Told* was the only available listening fare during the most popular listening time, the CIE insisted on promoting each installment as if it were a commercial program. One announcement, aired during the seven o'clock newscast, asked listeners, "Did you hear that program called 'NOW IT CAN BE TOLD'? That is the question listeners who heard the first broadcast in this exciting dramatic series are asking their friends." The nine-thirty announcement told listeners:

People everywhere are talking about the new radio program, "NOW IT CAN BE TOLD." It's the radio program that gives you the true story of the war, the true facts about the militarists and the civil leaders who led Japan on its road to aggression. "NOW IT CAN BE TOLD" enacts its exciting second chapter this Sunday at 8:00. Be with us at that time.⁹

But if the Japanese talked about *Now It Can Be Told*, it was because they hated the program.

Several observers and internal CIE Radio Branch documents noted the Japanese radio listeners' aversion to *Now It Can Be Told*. An official NHK history from 1977 wrote that "the program came as quite a shock to the people of Japan who were still dazed by their defeat" and that three hundred letters were received by NHK, "most of them denouncing the program." An NHK history reported that "at first, CIE officials considered such reactions as indicative of the programs' effectiveness, but later 'Now It Can Be Told' was ended in the face of continuing negative reactions" (NHK 145). Historian Marlene Mayo compiled a wonderful collection of reminiscences and documents to show that, while the CIE often denied it, the show received a negative response from its Japanese audience (Mayo, "War of Words" 58).

The Japanese found the information presented on the program difficult to hear. NHK reported, "To the ears of a people long alienated from the truth, the

facts sounded strange and unbelievable. Many people felt an almost-physical pain at hearing such inside stories for the first time" (NHK 145–46). The CIE, in 1945, noted both that Osaka listeners found it infuriating that NHK announcers who once sold the war were now selling democracy, and that "blame has been heaped on the Japanese, but few speakers have pointed out a way by which they can absolve themselves of that blame."¹⁰ The difficulty of the material presented was compounded by the format of the programming.

CIE officials blamed the Japanese audience's lack of radio sophistication for their rejection of *Now It Can Be Told*. One CIE report described the program as being "in the finest American dramatic tradition" but noted that "letters poured in saying: 'I can't keep up with it; it moves too fast'; 'Don't have music or sound effects behind a speech; I can't concentrate.'"¹¹ In several places, CIE officials, observers, and NHK broadcasters suggested that the format and style of *Now It Can Be Told* resembled that of *The March of Time*, a hit radio documentary in the United States (Kogo; Gayn 6–7). *Now It Can Be Told* featured a variety of voices, some short dramatic sections linked by narration, and music to provide listeners with an accessible and memorable account of events. Such an approach did resemble the successful (in the United States) *March of Time*, sponsored by *Time* magazine. But from descriptions of *Now It Can Be Told* and a sound recording in the NHK archive, there seems another important influence on this program—the agitprop dramas of the thirties and forties that the Voice of America (VOA) used as models for their early broadcasts to Nazi-occupied Europe and on which the Office of War Information (OWI) based its early domestic propaganda (Kogo; Shulman 53–60; Horten).

Like the radio dramas of Norman Corwin, Orson Welles, and John Houseman, the CIE written *Now It Can Be Told* sought to make ideological points in a style that combined drama and documentary. Corwin's *We Hold These Truths*, commissioned by the predecessor agency to the OWI in honor of the 150th anniversary of the Bill of Rights, was perhaps the most influential model for this kind of program. By coincidence, all the US radio networks broadcast *We Hold These Truths* just eight days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (Bannerman 73–88). The success of that program, with its combination of soaring rhetoric, music, drama, and facts, convinced both government and commercial broadcasters that propaganda could fit well into commercial radio. Historian Gerhard Horten described the relationship between the propaganda broadcasts prepared by the government and the propaganda included in ongoing commercial programs when he noted that during World War II US radio perfected "the integration of entertainment, advertising, and propaganda" (160).

The VOA, long before the end of the war, dropped agitprop documentary-dramas (many of which sound amazingly like *Now It Can Be Told*) from their repertoire because such programs reminded listeners of Nazi propaganda (Shulman 88–92). The OWI moved away from such docudramas and toward the

integration of propaganda into already existing shows for much the same reason (Horten 109–15). But the CIE Radio Branch thought of its program as the best that American radio, in both its documentary and dramatic forms, had to offer and not as propaganda. According to the CIE, *Now It Can Be Told*, of course, presented the truth.

The Japanese—like the French resistance fighters who disliked VOA broadcasts—found *Now It Can Be Told* too close to government propaganda. Far from being unsophisticated radio listeners, the Japanese had heard such programs before. Gordon Daniels, in an article about Japanese film and radio propaganda during World War II, noted:

One of NHK's greatest strengths lay in the mounting of coordinated campaigns to emphasize and re-emphasize a particular aspect of the war. . . . within a single day songs, literary works, drama, talks and symposia would all be transmitted to describe and enthuse about a special aspect of Japan's struggle. . . . Japanese broadcasters assumed that their audience would accept a surprising degree of seriousness (120).

An NHK history told of “National Spiritual Mobilization Week,” featuring poetry, music, speeches, dramas, and a radioed “bow to the Palace,” all thematically linked (NHK 74).

Building on radio's reputation as an excellent vehicle for propaganda, *Now It Can Be Told* sought both to present information and to convince listeners of the truthfulness of that information. The CIE made a sensible choice to base the style and form of this first program on earlier practices of US propaganda (which had come from commercial radio). But because the Japanese had been bombarded by government propaganda during the war, they proved reluctant to accept any additional government-controlled, self-conscious radio propaganda, and the programming didn't work very well. In order to become successful, the CIE moved away from the presentation of propaganda to innovations in scheduling, promotion, and surveying, all based on a commercial broadcasting model.

Yet all three of the occupation's aims with regard to radio coexisted in CIE activities. The CIE had always thought of informational dramas in commercial as well as propaganda terms. The CIE plan for 1952 noted that although the NHK “argued that the Japanese mind does not accept informational materials in entertainment programs,” this contention had been disproved by the popular program *The New Road* (based on a SCAP publication, *Primer of Democracy*), which “has done an outstanding job of selling the basic principles of democracy through entertainment.” The CIE explained:

In America, during the last war, the Government's campaigns were most effectively treated on radio by so-called non-information pro-

grams. Certainly this approach is the only feasible one for commercial radio interests which will not have the financial resources to program extensively on a sustaining basis, and few advertisers will select to sponsor straight informational programs. With a little more effort, there is a chance that information in entertainment will endure in Japan.¹²

The Japanese, however, continued to hear such programs not as entertainment but as propaganda. One SCAP memorandum reported that even with regard to *The New Road*, "numerous letters were received attacking the program on the grounds that it was government-inspired propaganda" and that the NHK officials took a "dim view" of the program."¹³ Throughout the occupation SCAP worked both to control radio broadcasting for propaganda purposes and to introduce a commercialized sensibility into programming, but after *Now It Can Be Told* the balance began to tip. The CIE still wrote whole propaganda programs (principally *The New Road*), but the Radio Branch also worked to change NHK programming practices to a more commercialized model.

The CIE promoted a series of audience participation programs as an effort that mixed control over the ideological content of programs with the advancing of its commercial mind-set. These programs rested on the idea that in order for democracy to flourish, the Japanese must be taught to prize the opinions and ideas of the individual. Participation programs ranged from Japanese versions of American quiz programs to man-on-the-street interviews to roundtables in which government officials answered citizens' questions. Programs included *Twenty Gateways* (a version of *Twenty Questions*) and *Fountain of Knowledge* (patterned after *Information Please*), which urged listeners to send in questions to stump a panel of experts; *The Amateur Talent Contest*, which drew many contestants; and more-serious programs such as *Man on the Street* and *Diet Roundtable*, which pushed individual Japanese to ask, on the air, questions of elected officials. A Japanese newspaper wrote about *Man on the Street* that

it is surprising to notice the changed attitude to it which has occurred on the part of the public. While formerly the announcer had to pursue people on the street for comments, people today compete to talk before the microphone. In other words, the national character which considered non-expression a virtue, now looks upon this matter quite differently. It is not an over statement to say that the "Man-on-the-Street" program has contributed to this change.¹⁴

The participation of ordinary Japanese, freely speaking their minds, on the radio made these new programs a transitional practice between CIE written propaganda and attempts to commercialize the form of Japanese radio.

The CIE saw such participation shows as a key wedge in their continuing effort to force NHK to take into account listener preferences. In 1967 NHK

noted that “programmes in which the general public could take part increased because of the belief that broadcasting was of the people and for the people. The role played by broadcasting in fostering democratic trends among the Japanese can never be overlooked,” and finished the paragraph by declaring that during the occupation “the policy of ‘what should be provided for the listeners?’ was changed to that of ‘what do the listeners prefer?’” (History Compilation Room 176–77). Certain attempts to find out what listeners thought illustrated deeply held American beliefs about broadcasting and changed the structure of Japanese radio. Looking at radio in occupied Japan shows how the American commercialized broadcasting system had become so completely naturalized that Americans could not think about radio except in commercialized terms (Czitrom; Smulyan). As Americans explained and defended their ideas to the Japanese, they also laid out their ideology of a commercialized democracy where market surveys expressed the will of the people.

In keeping with the aims of the occupation, the Radio Branch of the CIE sought to “democratize” Japanese radio. Participation shows were the most visible attempt to change programming from government-mandated and -controlled to listener-controlled. The Americans believed that only a commercial system is truly democratic because it is based on what listeners want. Such a view completely overlooks the fact that in a private system commercial interests, instead of government, decide what people listen to. American rhetoric insisted that a commercial system would be more responsive to the people than a government-sponsored system but failed to see its own problems. The Americans in charge of the transformation of broadcasting could think only in commercialized and privatized terms, a shortcoming that can be observed in the kinds of innovations they introduced to Japanese broadcasting.

From the beginning, the CIE insisted that NHK must undertake surveys of the listening population. How else would they know if anyone listened to their programs or which programs were most popular? The fact that after the war many Japanese receivers were built by tinkerers from spare parts rather than coming off an assembly line compounded the problem of figuring out the number of listeners (Takahashi). Yet the Japanese had some idea of how many people were listening, based on the number of receiver licenses bought. NHK couldn’t tell which programs were the most popular, and since licenses were generally sold by the year, their information wasn’t up-to-the-minute, but it was as accurate in what it did tell as the American methods soon introduced. The connection between surveying and the Americans’ commercial instincts was well understood. A *New York Times* article about occupation efforts to reform Japanese radio noted:

The problem now is to discover what interests those thirty million listeners. Formerly they were fed whatever pap the authorities thought good for them. . . . Since American radio technics [sic] have won pri-



"Without desks and without blackboard, the teacher conducts outdoor class work round a radio receiver which had escaped the fangs of war."



The quiz programme *Twenty Questions*. The first broadcast of this programme took place on 1 November, 1949.

mary distinction in salesmanship rather than artistry, it was natural for the radio unit to try grafting familiar technics [sic] onto Japanese radio's cultural patterns. (Costello)

But before high-quality, scientific surveying could be undertaken, several other issues with Japanese broadcasting had to be resolved.

By US standards, the timing of Japanese broadcasts seemed haphazard. In August 1947 the chief of the Radio Branch reported that the entire NHK system

is badly in need of centrally controlled and synchronized clocks.

There are no clocks operating accurately in any studio or control



NHK Radio & TV Culture Research institute established in June 1946. Scientific public opinion surveys have been undertaken periodically. A scene of survey by interview.

room thus far visited . . . except for one clock in the master control room at Radio Tokyo. Where clocks are available they are inaccurate and have no sweep second hands. At present the entire system is being run by the engineers' watches.¹⁵

Government-funded broadcasting had little interest in split-second timing, but a commercialized system had accustomed the Americans to the importance of standardized and accurate timing. In a commercialized model, sponsors buy time and demand an accounting of how their money is spent. In addition, scientific surveys of listeners called for programs at regular times in order to obtain precise measurements.

The Americans found the "dead air" in the Japanese broadcasting schedule appalling. One of the first statements by a CIE officer, in October 1945, noted that

I do by no means wish to Americanize Japanese radio. What I desire is to present what the Japanese public demands. From what I see, NHK is not exerting efforts to find out what the Japanese public desires. . . . the strangest feeling we experience in listening to Japanese radio is that there are "dead spots." It must be said that programmes organized in intermittent continuity lack the power of leading the listeners on. (History Compilation Room 174)

Even CIE agreed that Japanese listeners liked "dead air." A CIE report explained that the Japanese listener "is not accustomed to complicated radio technique. In fact, listeners often request five minutes of silence (dead air) after a talk to digest thoroughly the contents."¹⁶ The Americans' shock at dead air, at valuable time not available for sale, overcame their interest in what Japanese listeners wanted.

The Japanese most hated the "quarter system," an innovation that made broadcasting time available only in units of fifteen minutes. An NHK history reported that the system was "first objected to by NHK personnel, on the grounds that it would impose too-rigid restrictions on the compilation and broadcast of programs," but the CIE retorted that this was an international standard and would make continuous programming easier. Again, such a system grows out of the need to rationalize time so that it can be sold to sponsors. No reason for its use exists other than in a private commercialized system, but the quarter system took its place as part of the democratization of Japanese broadcasting.

Continuous programming and the quarter system also made much easier the kind of surveying on which the CIE insisted. In a tremendous effort, the Americans introduced elaborate surveying methods which NHK began instituting in twice-monthly surveys in November 1948. Between four thousand and six thousand listeners were surveyed in person in eight regions. With help from International Business Machines in Japan, a controlled sample of radio listeners was selected from owners of all registered sets. Five hundred interviewers were trained to administer the pretested surveys. The results of the surveys were presented in elaborate booklets, produced in both English and Japanese, that included information on the statistical relevance of the material and bar graphs about who listened to each program.¹⁷

While there is nothing inherently commercial about surveying radio listeners, the American context ensured that occupation officials conceived of surveys as providing the kind of information needed by sponsors. The British Broadcasting System, which inaugurated a Listener Research Section in 1936, surveyed to find out which listeners tuned in at particular times of the day, to settle questions of resource allocation among different departments, and to support decisions already made. Much of the early impetus for listener research at the BBC stemmed from 1930s fights, replicated within American broadcasting,

about the proportion of classical music to jazz broadcast (Crisell 38–41; Scannell and Cardiff 18–19, 234–42, 375–80). The NHK surveys, under the direction of the CIE, resembled those of the BBC in asking when people listened to the radio and categorizing listeners according to gender and geography. But the CIE-sponsored surveys went further, inquiring about particular programs rather than categories of programs. In addition to asking Japanese listeners what kind of music they preferred, NHK interviewers asked which specific programs they liked best. The large number of surveys, as many as twenty-four a year, also pointed to the felt American need to gather very specific, commercially useful information rather than general information about when, for example, rural men had time to listen to the radio.¹⁸

The CIE understood that such surveys had their origins in a commercial broadcasting system but insisted they could be useful to NHK as well. One report concluded:

Thus, for the first time in the history of Japanese radio, an accurate, scientific survey of radio listeners is being constantly made and radio programs in Japan are approaching the time when a low survey rating will mean automatic cancellation of a program and replacement by another. Since Japanese radio is not yet commercial, nor are programs sponsored, it is not likely that as much emphasis will be placed on the survey ratings as is true of the Hooper and Nielsen ratings in the States. However, competition for high survey ratings is growing keen and the listener is bound to reap the rewards of these surveys.¹⁹

In this formulation, what the rewards might be for Japanese listeners remained vague. But the connection between questioning listeners about their preferences and a democratic broadcasting system was, according to the Americans, a strong one. “Democracy is still a strange, new idea to [Japanese] broadcasters,” concluded one CIE report, but “they are interested and optimistic. And broadcasting remains one of the greatest hopes and one of the most useable media for completion of the democratization of Japan.”²⁰

The tight link between commercialized broadcasting and democracy remains one of the most interesting aspects of occupation policy with regards to Japanese radio. The consequences for the form Japanese broadcasting took after the occupation have only begun to be explored (Luther and Boyd; Kasza; Tsuchiya). The fact that Americans could think of a democratic system only in terms of commercialized and privatized radio tells a lot about the ubiquity of that system in the United States and the ways in which democracy had been modified.

Occupation radio reforms extended beyond changing programming to remaking the structure of the radio system, and this extension raises questions about the nature of broadcasting itself. In her excellent book *Mr. Smith Goes to*

Tokyo: Japanese Cinema under the American Occupation, Kyoko Hirano exhaustively outlines the interaction between the occupation forces and the Japanese film industry. While the occupation officials interfered in film content and personnel, they didn't tell the Japanese how to make films in the same way that the CIE instructed NHK on how to run a broadcasting operation. While films may be seen as the vision of a single person (which made the hunt for Communists so important in both the Japanese and American film industries), radio is a joint project and, as Michele Hilmes has written, provides the voice of a national narrative. The structure of a broadcasting system may have more to do with its content than is the case in the film industry. The government-run radio system was directly implicated in the sins of the Japanese government, and radio's immediacy, its constant presence, and its intimacy made it both an important target for occupation reworking and an important tool in the "teaching of democracy" that was the main aim of the occupation's cultural side.

The CIE finally balanced its three objectives with regard to radio—propaganda, commercialization, and "teaching democracy"—by proclaiming that the attributes of a commercialized broadcasting system allowed them to achieve all their goals. Rather than seeing a conflict between commercialization and democracy, the CIE proudly asserted that the two systems were identical. Reviewing the occupation's actions toward broadcasting allows us to see that the United States used the occupation not just to "teach democracy" but to sell democracy; in the process it not only conflated teaching and selling but presented democracy and consumption as the same.

Notes

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1. For a brilliant account of the complexities of the occupation (one which begins with Hirohito's broadcast), see Dower. For another recent monograph that observes the ways in which race complicated the occupation, see Koshiro. A useful overview of the scholarship on the occupation and its pitfalls is Gluck.

2. "Report BCJ: Duties and Responsibilities of the Radio Unit, Civil Information and Education Section," Box 5313, RG331, Supreme Command Allied Powers Papers, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland [hereafter SCAP Papers, NARA].

3. SCAP, 10–11.

4. "Radio Unit's Section of CI&E Report to CAD, New York, 5 May 1948," Box 5312, RG 331, SCAP Papers, NARA; Civil Information and Education Section, Information Division, Radio Branch, "CIE Radio Activities in the Two-Week Period Ending 15 May 1949," Box 5312, RG331, SCAP Papers, NARA. For a collection of American books on broadcasting donated to the NHK in 1948, see History Compilation Room, 191.

5. "Basic Principles of Broadcasting: Lecture Number One," Box 5315, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

6. The Japanese who participated included five men and one woman—Hiroshi Ninno, Teruko Iharha, Shigeruo Nakamura, Jiro Nanye, Michio Uea, and Seiji Shimaura. Nanye had recently been named head of programming for NHK; Iharaha was in charge of women's programming; and arrangements were made for Ninno to testify at the trial of Iva Toguri while he was in the United States. For correspondence about the course, resumes of participants, and an outline of the Columbia classes, see "Scholarships" Rockefeller Foundation BCJ," Box 5312, RG331, SCAP Papers, NARA.

7. Dwight Herrick to Jiro Nanye, 9 July 1949, "Scholarships" Rockefeller Foundation BCJ," Box 5312, RG331, SCAP Papers, NARA.

8. CIE Radio Branch to Chief, CIE, 18 November 1949, "Scholarships" Rockefeller Foundation BCJ," Box 5312, RG331, SCAP Papers, NARA.

9. "Publicity for Programs Broadcast: Broadcast Friday and Saturday, December 14 and 15," Box 5313, RG331, SCAP Papers, NARA.

10. "Investigational Report of Radio Osaka," Box 5316, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

11. Civil Information and Education Section, Radio Unit, Radio in Japan: A Report on the Condition of Broadcasting in Japan as of 1 October 1947," Box 5150, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA; also quoted in Mayo, "War" 58.

12. "1952 Fiscal Year Plan: Civil Information and Education Section to General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers," 22 Apr. 1952, Box 5317, RG 133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

13. CIC Radio Branch to Chief, CIE, 11 Apr. 1950, "Audience Response to the 'Primer of Democracy' (New Road) Radio Program," Box 5154, RG 133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

14. "Critical Comments on Dullness in the 'Man-on-the-Street' and 'National Radio Forum,'" trans. T. Omori, *Sunday Mainichi*, 25 July 1948, Box 8582, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

15. Chief, Radio Unit to Chief, CI&E Section, 9 Aug. 1947, "Progress Report on Long Range Plan," Box 5316, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

16. Civil Information and Education Section, Radio Unit, "Radio in Japan: A Report on the Condition of Broadcasting in Japan as of 1 October 1947," Box 5150, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

17. H. Passin, Public Opinion and Sociological Research Division to Radio Branch, Information Division, 28 July 1949, "Radio Audience Analysis Survey," Box 5872, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA; for the reports of the surveys themselves, see Box 5884 and Box 5885, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

18. "Radio Survey," Box 5185, RG 133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

19. H. Passin, Public Opinion and Sociological Research Division to Radio Branch, Information Division, 28 July 1949, "Radio Audience Analysis Survey," Box 5872, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

20. Civil Information and Education Section, Radio Unit, "Radio in Japan: A Report on the Condition of Broadcasting in Japan as of 1 October 1947," Box 5150, RG133, SCAP Papers, NARA.

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CHAPTER 15**BEFORE THE SCANDALS****The Radio Precedents of the Quiz Show Genre**

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THE QUIZ SHOW OCCUPIES an unusual place within media history. For the most part it is an ignored genre, consigned to the historical margins along with other predominantly daytime genres, including cooking programs, magazine shows, and children's programs, in favor of more legitimized genres, such as sitcoms, news, and prime-time dramas. Occasionally the genre is thrust into the mainstream, such as the boom in prime-time quiz shows in the 1999–2000 season, led by the breakout success of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. By far the most hailed example of the genre's popularity was in the late 1950s, when it occupied a central place within American culture at the locus of the so-called quiz show scandals. Media historians have focused on this crucial moment in quiz show history, looking at the big-money prime-time quizzes that were revealed to be rigged, to the virtual exclusion of other periods or incarnations of the genre. Of course the scandals of the late 1950s were quite important—in terms of larger cultural and industrial impacts, the scandals were certainly the most significant contribution of the quiz show to media history (at least until the impact of the current boom can be historically assessed). Yet the scandals are more often than not examined in a generic vacuum, based on the assumption that the quiz show emerged out of nowhere to first captivate and then disillusion the American viewing public.

In this essay I gaze backward from the 1950s to explore how the quiz show operated before the scandals. By looking at the period prior to the scandals, I trace out how the contested genre of the quiz show operated as a cultural category in a way that directly led to the scandals. As presented in traditional

accounts of the scandals, television audiences assumed certain generic conventions—such as “televised fair play” and “spontaneous unrehearsed competition”—as definitional elements of the genre; when the programs’ actual production practices turned out to contradict these conventions, the 1950s scandals ensued. But how did these conventions become associated with the quiz show? What other associations did quiz shows hold that may have helped lead to the scandals? In order to answer these questions, we need to look backward to the quiz show as it emerged and became popular as a genre on radio. By looking at the history of radio quiz shows, we can gain a more nuanced vision of television’s quiz show scandals—the radio era established nearly all of the generic conventions at play within the scandals, including setting the vital precedent that the quiz show belonged at the center of highly publicized controversies. As I argue throughout my analysis, the important events and effects of the television scandals would be difficult to imagine without the vital precedents established during the radio era, a facet of the genre’s history that has been overlooked by media historians in addressing the quiz show scandals (Anderson; Stone and Yohn).

The quiz show is one of the few radio genres that did not emerge as an adaptation of literary, cinematic, or theatrical entertainment. Thomas DeLong, in the only detailed account of radio quiz shows, suggests a number of antecedents, specifically newspaper puzzles, parlor games, spelling bees, and gambling, while the memoirs of TV quiz show producer Norm Blumenthal mentions carnival games and movie-house contests such as *Screeno* (Blumenthal 13; DeLong 1–3). The radio quiz show emerged in the earliest days of the medium’s commercialization, with local stations broadcasting programs such as WJZ’s *The Pop Question Game* in New York in 1923 (DeLong 6). Quiz programs continued on local stations throughout the 1920s, but the networks generally avoided the genre in this era, fearful of FRC (Federal Radio Commission, later Federal Communications Commission [FCC]) policies against on-air lotteries and threats that this genre did not operate “in the public interest,” per FRC mandate (DeLong 10).

The first major shift in this practice came in 1934, when Major Edward Bowes and his NBC program *Major Bowes’ Original Amateur Hour* became the most popular host and show on the airwaves. This program, awarding cash prizes to amateur performers selected by audience phone-in voting, brought many of the quiz show’s textual conventions to network radio: listener participation by phone, live competition, and monetary rewards (“Bowes Inc.,” DeLong 11). Bowes’s success prompted numerous successful imitators, leading one popular press article to suggest in 1937 that “the amateur hour long has wiggled and wobbled as the No. 1 radio craze of the nation.” In attempting to discern what trends might follow, the unnamed author shrewdly predicted that “the new question- and spelling-bees [could] now make a bid for nation-wide popularity” (“Ether Bees”). In 1937 *Professor Quiz* debuted on CBS; while it was not the first national quiz show, it was the first major success, prompting the first wave of

successful quiz shows in the late 1930s, including hits such as *Ask-It-Basket*, *Battle of the Sexes*, *Dr. I.Q.*, *Information Please!*, and *Quiz Kids*.

The first anti-quiz-show backlash followed quickly, as NBC's *Pot o' Gold* debuted in 1939 with a new gimmick: calling random people chosen from phone books and awarding them \$1,000 just for answering their phone, interspersed with musical numbers by host and bandleader Horace Heidt. The show simultaneously became tremendously popular and controversial, as the FCC tried to force the Department of Justice into prosecuting the show as a lottery. Although Justice decided not to prosecute, NBC was frightened enough to pull the hit after only two seasons. The other networks followed, retooling quiz shows to be certain that they did not violate lottery laws and FCC sentiments ("Stop the Money"). Quiz shows continued throughout the war years, still drawing a solid audience but engendering little controversy for the first half of the decade. A number of new spins on the genre emerged, most notably stunt shows such as *Truth or Consequences* and *People Are Funny*; these programs used the question-and-prize format as an excuse to force contestants to perform "zany" and "daffy" stunts in order to win increasingly lavish prizes (Eddy).

The late 1940s marked the second explosion in radio quiz show popularity, as new and old programs both began to raise contest stakes to include cash prizes in the thousands of dollars and extravagant prize packages. *Truth or Consequences* ran the "Mr. Hush" contest to identify a mystery voice for \$13,500 in prizes in 1946, leading to a flood of big-money giveaways (Eddy 39). *Stop the Music!* and *Sing It Again* returned to *Pot o' Gold* territory by soliciting their contestants via random phone calls, while shows such as *Queen for a Day* dispensed with questions and awarded bounty based on which contestant could evoke the most pity from studio audiences. Ratings soared again, with upstart *Stop the Music!* landing at the number two slot, beating longtime radio favorite Fred Allen in his time slot and leading Allen to publicly denounce quiz shows. The upsurge peaked in 1948, critical backlash arose from both outside and inside the radio industry, and in August the FCC threatened to not renew licenses to any station broadcasting giveaway shows, which they had deemed to be lotteries.¹ As I discuss at greater length below, networks protested and sued—by 1954, when the courts decided that giveaways were not lotteries, quiz shows had declined in popularity and lowered their jackpots, but the number of programs remained high, as they migrated to fill the emerging television schedule (DeLong 141–42). The quiz show would not experience another peak in popularity until the rise of big-money television quizzes and their subsequent scandals in the late 1950s, by which time the genre had practically vanished from the radio dial.

This brief chronicle of the rise of the radio quiz show suggests that this genre had two of the features often cited as unique to the quiz show scandals: vast popularity and publicized controversy. The quiz show's radio incarnation also set the stage for many of the other issues surrounding the late-1950s crisis.

We can examine the cultural assumptions tied to the quiz show genre in the radio era to understand the history of the genre as a category. The television scandals were predicated on specific assumptions of what were normal and proper aspects of quiz shows. The radio quiz show helped form this terrain of the genre, with direct and clear linkages to how the television scandals played out, especially in establishing the hierarchies that served as the cultural scaffolding supporting the genre throughout its scandalized history. Looking at the discursive circulation of the generic category “quiz show” in the radio era, we can trace specific linkages that had a profound impact upon television quiz shows and their controversial history yet have been mostly ignored in the historical accounts of the scandals. Thus for the rest of this essay I chart out the generic definitions, interpretations, and evaluations operative in press coverage, corporate and legal archives, references in popular culture, and a variety of other sources. I conclude by looking more closely at the most controversial moment of radio quiz show history, surrounding the FCC’s attempts to remove quiz shows from the air as violating lottery laws. Through this history we can see how the radio quiz show set the stage for the scandals of the 1950s by generically linking many of the crucial assumptions that motivated the more famous television scandals.

As I discussed above in my brief chronology of the quiz show, the initial incarnation of the genre that followed the popularity of amateur shows focused primarily upon the intellectual challenge of contestants competing for modest prizes, typified by *Professor Quiz* and *Dr. I.Q.* This was the dominant incarnation of the quiz show—the question-centered quiz—which producer Dan Golenpaul was reacting to through his innovation of *Information Please!* in 1938. By reversing the typical procedures of the quiz show, audience members mailed the program questions to pose to a panel of experts (Pringle). Another adaptation in the format of these question-centered quiz shows shifted focus onto child contestants, most notably on *Quiz Kids* in 1940. All of these popular programs typified the dominant features of the early quiz show: questions of intellectual knowledge, small prizes, and highbrow educational overtones. Contestants were seen as highly educated elites, able to match wits with the erudite panelists of *Information Please!* or *Quiz Kids*. Quiz shows were culturally understood as a legitimate and valued type of broadcasting.

This dominant understanding of the quiz show was affirmed by its positive placement in hierarchies of social value. The popular press featured parents and teachers praising the educational value of *Quiz Kids* (Hayes 71). Similarly, an on-air promo found in NBC’s corporate archives highlighted the show’s educational aspect: “boys and girls everywhere are taking new interest in their school work and their studies—and, believe it or not, they are finding it fun. . . . Teachers and principals have worked a long time to accomplish what you *Quiz Kids* have done in just six months—that is, you’ve actually succeeded in making education

popular."² *Information Please!* was also accorded favorable cultural value, as the *Saturday Review of Literature* gave the show an award for "Distinguished Service to American Literature" in 1940, working against the clear hierarchy that valued literature and publishing over broadcasting (Cousins). The educational value of quiz shows was reiterated throughout many audience letters as well, confirming that for at least some listeners, educational factors were an important component of the genre's appeal; as one letter asserts, "my husband, children and myself have gained more general knowledge from quiz shows than we learned in school."³ Thus the dominant definition of question-centered quiz shows as intellectual competition was explicitly linked with positive social values and education.

Tied to this understanding of the genre was a significant underlying generic assumption: quiz shows were spontaneous, and ad-libbed, and featured unrehearsed, fair competition. Certainly these conventions were violated in television's quiz show scandals, to great public dismay, but we can see these elements articulated around these earlier radio programs in ways that force us to question the myth of the innocent television public of the late 1950s. Few public accounts directly suggest that programs were not spontaneous—the description of the local Baltimore program *Quiz the Scientist* was an exception, as the show allowed listeners to query a panel of expert scientists for a \$1 reward but admitted that the answers were scripted in order to ensure scientific accuracy and educational value ("Bright Quiz"). A similarly extreme example in the popular press told the "story about an emcee who wanted a certain contestant to win, and he told her the correct answer before they went on the air. When he threw the question at her, the lady's mind went blank. 'I can't remember,' she moaned into the mike, 'what you told me to say'" (Zolotow 89). Despite these exceptions, most industry-sanctioned accounts of quiz shows made it clear that the programs were "authentic" in featuring unstaged competition.

Skepticism about the genre's veracity was more common among commentators and audience members. One magazine article described the author's suspicion that a local program called *Meet the Experts* was fixed, as the show featured station employees such as the receptionist and sales manager answering difficult questions on British royalty, furthering the assumption that quiz show contestants were not the typical working American (O'Connor, "It's Spontaneous!"). Audience letters, as found in both the NBC corporate collection and the FCC archives, indicated that a number of listeners believed that the programs must have been faked. One anonymous letter to the FCC, allegedly from a former quiz show writer, claimed that some shows use "stooges" or hired contestants, and that any pretense of randomly selecting contestants was fraudulent.⁴ Skepticism concerning the genre's authenticity was further indicated by the number of press accounts that reiteratively insisted that quiz shows were in fact unrehearsed and fair (Pringle; Robinson). As Foucault suggests that the degree to which the Victorian era denied sexuality provided evidence of the cultural

centrality of sex, it would seem that the compulsion to reiterate the genre's authenticity had to be in response to some culturally operative skepticism that was far less well documented.

We can see this skepticism and affirmation played out especially clearly in the case of *Quiz Kids*. Listeners regarded the erudition of the young contestants with suspicion, writing to NBC and the press with their concerns. One listener wrote to NBC complaining about perceived dishonesty within *Quiz Kids*. She cited suspicions that a seven-year-old contestant could answer questions so quickly and correctly and pointed to "the recitation manner of his delivery, the committing to memory of a certain definition and telling the same in school room fashion." She went on to discuss the evidence that confirmed her suspicions at length:

When Mr. Kelly, at the close of the program, engaging in ad lib conversation with this child about the turtle question, he ruined forever your *Quiz Kids* program, for this same Girard answered him with "And besides I know the man who sent in the question." The prolonged laughter and applause by the studio audience seemed to come from pent up feelings of doubt and unbelief that had been eagerly awaiting the bomb which your Girard released on your show to convince them that the whole thing is a hoax and a deception. This sort of program should not be permitted to be aired in the name of an unrehearsed program, because every response from this child Girard has been drilled into him and has come forth in labored, recitation form.

The writer concluded by arguing that "this could have been such an interesting and instructive program if it had been kept honest, but I don't believe anything you could do now would reinstate it in public favor."⁵ While NBC officials wrote back to assure her that there were no unfair elements in the program's competition, it would appear that some viewers felt betrayed by the program's perceived violation of the genre's implied norms.

Quiz Kids prompted more dual claims of doubt and authenticity; writers in the popular press expressed listener skepticism that children could be so erudite and quick with their answers, while defending claims of rehearsed control by assuring readers of the show's spontaneity (Beatty, "Baby Miracle" 140; Hayes; Hutchens 31; McEvoy). One magazine article suggested extreme public uproar in reaction to a detailed recitation of Greek mythology by one *Quiz Kid*:

Bitter letters poured in, charging that the whole thing was a fake, that the children were given the questions ahead of time and rehearsed, which is not true. Topping the protests was a formal document from a reading society in Roxbury, Mass., signed by the president, the secretary, and the "technical adviser." "Imagine," it demanded, indicating

that such radio charlatans should be thrown in jail, "a seven-year-old boy well acquainted and well founded on Greek mythology!"

The writer assured readers that many people had researched the matter and proven that the show was authentically spontaneous. Despite this assurance, these instances suggest that claims of the public's naive and innocent belief in the authenticity of quizzes in the late 1950s are not as clear-cut as historians have asserted, as suspicions of the genre's use of scripted answers and planned outcome had distinct precedence on the radio.

While spontaneity was a central (if not undisputed) generic assumption, many articles in the popular press pointed to how the shows were carefully planned, despite their impromptu results. For instance, an article on *Information Please!* suggested that the show was "unrehearsed, but that doesn't mean that it is not carefully planned or, as radio lingo puts it, 'programmed.'" For instance, producer Dan Golenpaul originally intended for listeners to ask their own questions on the air, but one person changed his query for the live broadcast: "After the show, the iconoclast explained that he regarded the whole thing as staged, and proposed, in fact, to stump the experts" (Pringle 146). Thus Golenpaul countered accusations of inauthenticity by exerting more control and planning. A popular press article quoted another show's question writer on his ability to control when contestants win or lose the jackpot: "You can't make a person win, but you can be reasonably sure of making him miss. No one can answer a question if you don't want him to. With a week's preparation, I can stump anybody." He vaguely added that when it was time for the jackpot to be won, "we lay it in their laps" (qtd. in Peck). Another article assured audiences that while "their programs sound as if all the words were made up on the spur of the moment . . . each show is carefully rehearsed for hours, with scripts that are blank in the spots in which the names of winners or losers are used" (Beatty, "Backstage" 61). While spontaneity was held up as a generic attribute, the quiz show was often described as a controlled format, with scripts and planning serving to balance the illusion of completely ad-libbed programming.

Thus we can see that in the early 1940s the clearly established dominant conception of the quiz show genre tied together a number of central assumptions and conventions. Programs were focused on contestants competing to win prizes via intellectual questioning. The genre was socially validated through the framework of educational appeals and cultural uplift, focusing on legitimated realms of knowledge by asking questions of fact and objective knowledge. While the competition was generally regarded as unstaged and "fair," there were currents of doubt running through the cultural conception of quiz shows, finding their articulation through audience letters, press commentaries, and industrial defenses of the genre's authenticity. Even as the genre was primarily understood as featuring "fair competition," notions of staged entertainment were linked to

quiz shows, as producers publicly acknowledged their ability to control the seemingly ad-libbed format. This set of assumptions and conventions formed the core cultural understanding of the quiz show genre that future generic shifts would react to.

As Rick Altman has argued, genre mixing is one of the primary ways in which genres evolve and change throughout their history—by bringing in the conventions and assumptions of other genres, new subgenres and fully distinct genres can emerge. Quiz programs were subject to genre mixing, often combined with other established program styles to create new variations. For example, NBC featured comedy stunt–audience participation programs (*Ralph Edwards Show, Truth or Consequences*), comedy quiz programs (*You Bet Your Life*), mystery quizzes (*\$1000 Reward*), and numerous musical quiz shows (*Pot o' Gold*). Through genre mixing in the early 1940s two new incarnations of the quiz show emerged that would prove to be vital to leading the genre to its late-1950s destiny: the stunt show and the giveaway show. In tracing out the history of these two other quiz show modes, we can see how they helped set the stage for the scandals of 1950s television.

The stunt show emerged in the early 1940s along with the standard question-centered quiz show, but it reversed many of the genre's conventions and assumptions. While standard quiz shows featured intellectual questions, fair competition, and modest prizes, stunt programs downplayed question-and-answer format in the name of highly staged contests and lavish prizes. The primary innovator and smash hit of this variation of the quiz show was *Truth or Consequences*, “the one audience-participation program where the disappointed contestants are those who answer their questions correctly” (Schapper 106). On this popular program, host and creator Ralph Edwards brought members from the studio audience and asked them a “Truth,” or standard quiz show question. While the Truth paid \$15 for a correct answer, most contestants failed to answer it properly:

The questions are ridiculous twisters, to start with; they must be answered in twenty seconds, and Edwards jams eighteen of those twenty seconds with other questions like “Is your work going well?” and “Are you happy being here?” No one minds the obvious fraud. Most contestants prefer to accept an alternative reward of five dollars and whatever Consequences Edwards has cooked up. (Lear 14)

Other magazine articles suggested that contestants usually tried to answer the Truth incorrectly in order to participate in the Consequence (“To the Top”; Hutchens 31). Edwards claimed he devised the show to avoid the humiliation he thought failed quiz show contestants must have felt, giving them something fun to do instead of simply proving their intelligence (Schapper 108).

Even though *Truth or Consequences* still used questions as a framing device, the role of the question as the central competitive and entertainment element

in the quiz show was replaced by the “stunt” in this particular subgenre, often labeled “crackpot show,” “zany audience-participation show,” or just “stunt show.” These stunts ranged widely in complexity and excessiveness; for example Edwards solicited listeners to send a contestant pennies, resulting in over three hundred thousand cents arriving within a few weeks (Eddy 133). Another, more elaborate stunt ran over a number of months and sent the contestant, Rudolph Wickel, on a wild hunt through a number of states for the ultimate reward of \$1,000 (“Shindig”). Edwards’s prime competitor in the stunt show was Art Linkletter’s *People Are Funny*, whose more notable stunts included making a woman not speak for one week to win \$1,000, and giving a family an airplane for answering the question “What is your name?” (“Speaking of Pictures”; Eddy 134). Along with downplaying the intellectual question, the stunt quiz shows raised the stakes of the jackpots awarded to the “winners,” focusing on lavish merchandise and cash prizes, such as Linkletter’s proud offer of “the first complete prize in radio history—a home, garage, lot, car, and a lifetime job in Southern California” (“Quizzing Bee” 62).

As this new form of the quiz show emerged in the early 1940s, a number of complaints followed within the popular press. One rising trend saw hosts prompting contestants with clues to easy questions, as caricatured in the popular press by this hypothetical quiz show host’s patter: “Who wrote *Hamlet*? His first name is William. No coaching, please. Don’t *shake*, Mrs. Stupidovitch; I’m not going to stick you with a *spear*” (Beatty, “\$100,000 Idea?” 45). The general dumbing down of questions became a topic of consternation among many writers. One popular press article celebrated intellectual throwback *Twenty Questions* because, “unlike most radio quizzes, no one wins \$5,000,000 for knowing who was President during the Wilson Administration, or gets smacked with a bag full of wet cement if he fails to get the correct answer” (“This Family”). The demise of the intellectual question was most pronounced in writer Edwin O’Connor’s scathing critique of the genre. O’Connor suggested that originally quiz shows “stipulated that the contestant should answer that question in order to win the attached award. Moreover . . . they held that the answer must come from the contestant himself, with no outside assistance.” As the genre grew older, it changed: “although it still asks questions, it regards the unaided answer as an irrelevancy . . . The time has come to abandon all the hocus-pocus of the question program, which really is looking for no answers at all” (O’Connor, “Prove You’re Human!” 113). Thus the decline of the intellectual question was culturally activated as a sign of generic devaluation and derision, as the remaining “real” quiz shows, such as *Information Please!*, were continually celebrated by commentators within intrageneric hierarchies as more legitimate than stunt shows such as *Truth or Consequences*.

The competing cultural conceptions of the dual forms of the quiz show in the early 1940s—question-centered quiz vs. stunt show—primarily concerned

understanding quiz shows as both educational and entertaining. Despite the presence of educational discourses in constituting the question-centered quiz, all quiz shows were associated with entertainment far more than education. Even *Information Please!*, the program often held up as the most purely intellectual quiz show, was celebrated for its entertainment value as well. One mainstream press writer noted that the show improved on its early efforts as it “increased its entertainment value by stressing the personalities on its board of experts. They don’t just answer questions now, as they did at first. They put on a show” (Hutchens 31). Likewise, a magazine writer opposed the numerous educational accolades the program received to the “fortunate” fact that the experts “still think they’re playing a game, having a lot of fun, and are not educating the populace” (Beatty, “\$100,000 Idea?” 93). Ultimately *Information Please!* and other examples led one article to proclaim that “quiz shows are conceived as entertainment. Their primary object is to amuse” (Peck). Other pleasures notwithstanding, the entertainment function of quiz shows was rarely contested, even by a highbrow press detractor of the genre who interpreted the genre as “an attempt . . . to entertain its listeners by the simple device of proving to them that their fellow citizens were not quite bright” (O’Connor, “Prove You’re Human!” 113). As a production manual asserted, the quiz show’s “purpose is almost invariably entertainment, though occasionally it might have educational or instructional overtones” (Crews 258).

Even though the genre was acknowledged to primarily feature entertainment, the specific form of entertainment provided by quiz shows was a common topic of discussion in the press. For instance, the shift away from “hard knowledge” programs such as *Professor Quiz* and toward more-comedic shows like *How’m I Doin’?* and *Take It or Leave It* was characterized by “their less difficult questions . . . [and hosts] given to extended wisecracking; equipped also with music, their programs have a distinct touch of the variety show.” Likewise on *Truth or Consequences*, “the questions are incidental to the slapstick comedy involved in the goofy consequences; it is as much vaudeville as radio” (Hutchens 12). By the mid-1940s humor became a central generic element, surpassing competition: “today a quiz program is mainly designed to exhibit slices of life, to present a cross section of strange, wonderful, bizarre and queer specimens of humanity. Frequently the dumber a contestant is, the funnier he sounds on the air” (Zolotow 18). This shift, tied to the rise of the stunt show, formed the ground for many condemnations of the genre, suggesting nostalgia for an earlier quiz show incarnation; “professional contestant” Louis Fehr expressed such sentiments in 1946:

Outside of *Professor Quiz*, none of the emcees is running a genuine quiz program. They run circuses. They purposely needle and ride the contestant in order to upset him, so he will make a fool of himself and

the show will make people laugh. They don't want the cool, composed type or the intelligent, well-informed citizen. They want the boobs.
(Qtd. in Zolotow 90)

Similarly, in the 1950 film *Champagne for Caesar*, the character of “know-it-all” Beaugard Bottomley (Ronald Colman) decried the degradation of knowledge promoted by quiz shows—if knowing facts such as $2 + 2 = 4$ was rewarded upon these shows, he contended, the average intelligence of the American public would sink to this level. When other “common” audience members told him that they found the show entertaining and the host (played by *People Are Funny* host Art Linkletter) funny, he dismissed them (and the genre) as lowbrow and unrefined. Although the rise of the comedic quiz show gave ammunition to highbrow critiques of the genre, entertainment had always been a central assumption of the quiz show genre. But as we will see, the distinction between legitimated educational and intellectual pleasures of the genre and its less respected entertaining functions played an important role leading to the genre's television scandals.

While both educational and entertainment discourses were central in the distinction between question-centered and stunt quizzes, other generic pleasures were also activated within this generic dichotomy. One distinct pleasure of quiz shows was “what quiz-industry tycoons call ‘the unrehearsed, unwritten ending.’ The biggest ratings in radio and TV, they point out, invariably go to special events whose outcomes are in doubt and whose scripts are unprepared” (Peck). Tied to the generic convention of spontaneity, quiz shows presented a situation leading audiences to believe that anything can happen, even when audiences and producers both knew that the overall results will probably be quite controlled and follow the patterns of previous programs. But within the specific moments of the program, audiences wondered whether a given question would be answered correctly, whether a given contestant would succeed or fail. Both forms of the genre tapped into this pleasure of competition, as listeners rooted for or against contestants and competed vicariously at home.

One primary appeal of the genre pointed toward its active competitive pleasures. Producer Mark Goodson wrote that the quiz show “permits listeners to compete in the game. . . and most quiz shows are listened to, not passively the way people listen to drama or music, but actively as a game in which the listener participates” (qtd. in “River of Gold”). One popular press writer cited the “listener's vicarious involvement in conflict. . . he gets almost as much enjoyment out of the game as the real player and, what's more, can't lose” (Peck). A production manual claimed “the charm and audience interest in a quiz program is vicarious participation” (Crews 260). One popular article bore this out when describing the experience of listening to *Quiz Kids*: “You find yourself sitting on the very edge of your chair in your own desire to participate in the questions

that are being asked, and you may be mortified when you realize you do not know the answer” (Hayes 27). Fans of *Information Please!* gathered each week to compete against the experts on the radio, literally involving themselves in the program’s competition (Robinson 68–69). Producers recognized the importance of dramatic interest in structuring the competition—despite the ad-libbed format, a production manual insisted that the quiz show’s structure still “must follow out the basic tenets of good showmanship and contain conflict, rising interest, a climax, and a dénouement” (Crews 158). Since the competitive framework of the quiz show, as established by the radio era, formed one of the prime pleasures for the audience, the outrage of the television scandals resulted partially from the realization that this competition was illegitimate, relying more upon dramatic structuring than had previously been publicly acknowledged.

While competitive and dramatic pleasures have always been central to the genre, the rise of the stunt show altered the ways in which competition and vicarious participation factored into the genre. *Truth or Consequences* and its aforementioned lengthy stunt with Wickel was highlighted in the popular press to demonstrate that the show’s pleasures were not in winning prizes but in the process of delaying people’s gratification, especially considering that the audience was practically assured that contestants would win their prizes (“Shindig”).⁶ Even though the stunt shows in the 1940s downplayed intellectual competition, the potential for participation remained a vital generic pleasure. Many of these stunts potentially involved the home audience’s participation, as the contestants’ unpredictable path might involve a treasure hunt or mail-in element that could involve listeners directly. (But it was the rise of the third mode of the radio quiz show, the giveaway program, that both thrust listener participation into the foreground of the genre’s constitutive elements and set the wheels in motion that would most directly lead television quizzes down the path toward scandal.)

Giveaway programs first achieved public infamy in 1939 with NBC’s *Pot o’ Gold*. Much more of a musical program than a quiz show, the program featured one contest per show among ten musical numbers by Horace Heidt and his Musical Knights.⁷ As fictionalized in the 1941 film musical *Pot o’ Gold*, the show was primarily a musical program that “accidentally” stumbled upon the giveaway gimmick as a successful marketing move. The actual origins of the program were far less accidental (or driven by the typical romance plot of the musical) but equally devised as a gimmick to make Heidt stand out among the glut of broadcast big bands (DeLong 32–37). The giveaway format of *Pot o’ Gold* featured no question-and-answer component—contestants won \$1,000 simply for answering their phones when randomly called. As mentioned previously, the FCC interpreted this format as violating lottery laws, requesting that the Justice Department prosecute *Pot o’ Gold* as illegal. While Justice did not take up the case, *Pot o’ Gold* left the air following these accusations, and other shows avoided giveaways to remove the threat of FCC prosecution.

The second (and more successful) rise of giveaways grew out of the stunt programs. In 1946 Ralph Edwards started a contest called "Mr. Hush" on *Truth and Consequences*—each week a mystery voice read a riddle and series of clues. Edwards would then call a random telephone number, asking whoever answered to identify the mysterious "Mr. Hush"; it took weeks of trying, but eventually a listener gave the correct answer, Jack Dempsey, and won an enormous jackpot of sponsor-provided merchandise. Subsequent contests, such as "Walking Man" and "Mrs. Hush," were expanded to allow listeners to submit their phone numbers. These telephone contests became a national sensation, with winners making headlines, ongoing speculation in gossip columns discussing the potential answers, and the show's ratings rising to record levels.

Edwards's contests reinvigorated the giveaway format, leading to shows based solely upon the giveaway gimmick. The most successful giveaway show was *Stop the Music!*, which rode its high-stakes contest asking listeners to name the mystery song to both ratings success and regulatory disapproval. As I discuss below, the rise of the giveaway led to a cultural crisis that presaged many of the issues arising in the more notorious television scandals. The various assumptions tied to all three modes of the radio quiz show would reappear within both the late-1940s radio scandals and the 1950s television version. One of the most crucial generic assumptions tied to the radio quiz show was the familiarity of the genre as a site of scandal, a linkage clearly established in the well-publicized giveaway controversy. To explore how this assumption played into the genre's history, I now turn to a microanalysis of the giveaway show, focusing on a particularly contentious moment in the history of the genre—the FCC's attempted ban of quiz shows in the late 1940s.

Regulating Genre Categories and Crisis Historiography

Media historians have worked under the assumption that the quiz show scandals of the late 1950s were an anomaly in the history of the genre, but I wish to argue that the television scandals were different more as a matter of degree than of kind. As I discussed above, many of the generic assumptions that were activated and ruptured within the scandals were established within the radio era. The scandals drew upon one particular incarnation of the genre, the intellectually driven big-money programs, which was only one of the diverse formats the quiz show had taken in the radio era. The radio era established the genre as a site of audience skepticism, as a variety of historical traces provide evidence that audiences were neither as innocent nor as accepting of the media's construction of reality as the preferred narrative of the scandals might suggest. The importance of the entertainment function of the genre was firmly established in the radio era as well, with the development of a number of programmatic conventions designed to increase dramatic intrigue and vicarious audience pleasures. But

one other association was fostered in the radio era that I have not yet addressed adequately—the establishment of the quiz show as a common site of well-publicized controversy and scandal.

In general, the FCC takes little interest in programming formats and genres, as it is explicitly forbidden to censor programming or mandate particular programming practices.⁸ Yet the FCC does have both the authority and the duty to enforce a number of programming guidelines as stipulated within the Communications Act of 1934, among these a regulation outlawing lotteries using the airwaves.⁹ Thus in 1948 the FCC issued a statement positing an interpretation of the quiz show that defined the genre as lotteries, and threatened to deny license renewals to any station broadcasting giveaways, effectively outlawing the genre. While the FCC's ban was eventually dismissed by the US Supreme Court and thus never fully enforced, this moment of regulation stands as a turning point in the genre's history, establishing important precedents that directly impacted the more notorious scandals of the late 1950s.

The FCC's actions concerning quiz shows in the late 1940s were not without precedent. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s the FCC refused to advise broadcasters whether planned programs would violate the lottery section of the Communications Act, saying that the commission did not have the authority to judge programming before airing.¹⁰ The FCC did assert that they could prosecute broadcasters for actually airing lotteries and deny them license renewals after the fact, and in 1940 the commission attempted to follow through with this promise. The FCC recommended a number of programs to the Department of Justice for prosecution because of alleged violation of Section 316 of the Communications Act; the most high-profile program in this group was NBC's hit *Pot o' Gold*. FCC chairman James Lawrence Fly "made it clear that he did not consider programs employing the prize offer technique as in the public interest. He expressed himself to one group of broadcasters as viewing them in effect as placing radio in the position of 'buying' its audience" ("Justice Dept."). Thus giveaways were linked to lotteries by the FCC, associating the genre with illegitimate broadcasting rather than "proper" entertainment.

The Justice Department refused to prosecute the broadcasters for violating lottery laws. Despite the lack of legal ramifications, the genre was effectively changed by this action; as one article asserted, "the radio industry got a big scare, [and] quickly began revamping the shows FCC objected to" ("Stop the Money"). The link between quiz shows and lottery laws became publicly explicit and discussed in the press, establishing the genre as a site of legal concern. As fictionalized in the 1941 film *Pot o' Gold*, the mechanism for the quiz show had to be carefully designed to operate legally in the public interest. When Jimmy Stewart's character tried to devise a way to legally give away \$1,000 randomly on the air, a government representative was brought in to oversee the construction of the gimmick in accordance with the lottery laws. While this type of regulatory



The 1941 film *Pot o' Gold* dramatizes the radio show's method for selecting contestants using numbered phone books and a giant roulette wheel—a gimmick that led the FCC to take action against the program for violating lottery laws. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

oversight was exactly what the FCC was forbidden to do—the commission was required to be reactive to programming, unable to advise broadcasters on program preparation lest it be accused of censorship—the fictional re-creation of *Pot o' Gold's* origins posited that the program was designed to operate in the public interest and conform with regulations, furthering a discursive association between the quiz show genre and legal concerns.

By the late 1940s the genre had transformed significantly. Stunt programs had raised the monetary stakes for prizes and replaced intellectual competition with behavioral spectacles and long-running contests. The home giveaway format, which had declined in prevalence after the 1940 investigation, came back to the airwaves with higher prizes and more publicity through ongoing contests featured on stunt programs. The lightning rod program was ABC's *Stop the Music!*, which debuted in early 1948 and rose quickly to number two in the weekly ratings. The show's structure was simple—host Bert Parks would call a randomly selected phone number and offer a high-stakes jackpot if the listener could name the Mystery Melody featured in an ongoing contest. The program's success was met with controversy both within the industry and more generally. The National

Association of Broadcasters (NAB) publicly pronounced that it was committed to entertainment over “buying an audience,” critics decried the decline of the genre’s intellectual and entertainment content, audience members flooded networks and the FCC with letters weighing in on the controversy, and stars such as Fred Allen lambasted quiz shows in the press. While the jackpots featuring lavish prizes were sold as part of the format’s appeal, both articles in the popular press and a feature film, 1950’s *The Jackpot*, highlighted how prize winners might view the ensuing tax burden and publicity tied to winning as more of a curse than blessing (McNulty, “The Jackpot”). Throughout this generic crisis, we can see a number of vital precedents for the later scandals of the television era.

Just as the quiz show genre had changed by the late 1940s, the regulatory context of the era had shifted from when the FCC had previously attempted to prosecute *Pot o’ Gold*. Following World War II the FCC began examining the public service practices and failures of radio broadcasters, resulting in a 1946 report famously known as the Blue Book.¹¹ The FCC became vocally critical of broadcasting practices that focused on advertising and ratings gimmicks, practices that led to the dominance of popular sponsored programs over locally produced shows, public affairs coverage, and sustaining programs. While the FCC never followed through with their threats to deny license renewals over Blue Book accusations, the atmosphere certainly changed simply by having made such a public declaration concerning programming content. The NAB loudly protested the FCC’s regulatory threats and lobbied Congress to keep the agency’s power in check. Thus in the late 1940s the regulatory environment shifted toward a more activist mode, with the FCC making public statements and rulings concerning programming, an area of broadcasting that had been largely untouched for the previous two decades. The FCC ruling against giveaways in 1948 emerged out of this context, with the agency establishing itself as more of a watchdog over commercial interests in the name of the public interest.

As the FCC threatened to drive giveaway programs from the air, the press coverage of the issue highlighted the questionable entertainment value of the genre, interpreting the giveaway as explicitly “buying an audience.” One magazine article described the decline of giveaways as shifting “toward entertainment programs, away from prize questions, prize songs, prize telephone calls . . . A mild revolution in radio thus is about to take place. Program appeal once more will depend on entertainment instead of the lure of easy money” (“Threat to Radio”). Fred Allen—whose ratings were severely weakened by his time slot competitor, *Stop the Music!*—reinforced this distinction, praising the FCC: “It’s about time radio was taken away from the scavengers and given back to the entertainers” (qtd. in “No Chance”). A local Florida station decided to cancel three local giveaway programs prior to binding FCC action because “the audience would rather have good entertainment” (“Giveaway Front”). NBC similarly eschewed the giveaway format using these terms: “We will have no part of it. It

isn't entertainment. Instead of a script and actors, all they use is a lot of refrigerators and an announcer who can talk fast" (qtd. in Beatty, "Backstage" 61). The FCC defined the giveaway in similar terms; as commissioner James Fly wrote, "under this type of program, listeners are attracted not by the quality of the program but simply by the hope of being awarded a valuable prize simply by listening to a particular program. This is not good broadcasting."¹² Within this discourse, giveaway shows were opposed to "honest" quality entertainment formats such as drama, music, and comedy, working against the clear linkages between quiz shows and entertainment established throughout the genre's history on radio.

Not all discussions around the FCC action suggested that the quiz show had no entertainment value. Many voices distinguished between the "properly" entertaining quiz and the giveaway which tried to buy its audience; a spokesperson for Mutual's flagship station, WOR, offered this dichotomy: "The giveaway craze and large prizes have begun to overshadow the entertainment value of [quiz] programs. Such overemphasis is not healthy for radio" ("Goodbye, Easy Money"). Other industry players insisted that the giveaway was no different in entertainment value from the genre as a whole, such as ABC's claim that their quiz shows "were all purely entertainment" ("Time's Almost Up" 53). Likewise, *Stop the Music!* producer Louis Cowan filed a brief with the FCC insisting on the entertainment values of his program and the giveaway format, highlighting the vicarious pleasures, community-building participation, "everyman" appeals, and dramatic structure of giveaways.¹³ Despite protests by ABC and Cowan, this dichotomy between "entertaining" intellectual quizzes and audience-buying giveaways was eventually reinforced by the networks' actions: pulling most of the controversial home giveaways off the air, while favoring quiz shows in which only in-studio contestants won prizes in the transition to television.

While this opposition did win out, eventually structuring the genre for the 1950s and television, it was certainly contested in the press. A former winner on *Winner Take All* complained that "it's a shame the FCC should be so nasty as to try to stop all this nice entertainment" ("No Chance"). Magazine writer and quiz show defender Jerome Beatty praised giveaways: "In spite of what some people say, each of these shows is entertaining—the music is good, the questions are interesting, and the breathless masters of ceremonies make them as exciting as a horse race" ("Backstage" 61). *New York Times* radio critic Jack Gould summarized the proponents' argument: "there may be more drama in a housewife's groping for an answer to a \$15,000 question than in a Broadway play. The public, in short, finds many things 'entertaining' outside the world of professional entertainment" (16). Thus many public voices questioned the legitimacy of the distinction between proper entertainment and giveaway pleasures, problematizing what the FCC claimed to be not in the public interest.

The public at large voiced its opinions concerning the FCC's actions through a deluge of letters to the commission. While according to one trade

article the letters were 60 percent in favor of the ban, my own examination of the hundreds of letters stored at the National Archives suggests a range of positions concerning the FCC's policy ("Public Favors FCC").¹⁴ Some letters did address the FCC's specific accusation against giveaways—that they were lotteries in violation of Communications Act and US Criminal Code stipulations. Yet most letter writers were not interested in debating the legal interpretations of lotteries; rather, they were concerned with base-level judgments as to the genre's value for society and the radio audience. Letters in support of the FCC labeled quiz shows "junk," "cheap," and morally destructive, and characterized them as promoting gambling. Many letters decried the genre's promise of easy riches, suggesting that "numerous addicts are neglecting family duties endeavoring to win something."¹⁵ Another letter highlighted the detrimental effects the genre might have upon listeners, writing that quiz shows "engender envy, jealousy, unrest, and discontent."¹⁶ Numerous letters argued that giving away money and prizes in exchange for answering the phone or listening to the radio ran counter to American values of hard work, explicitly drawing links between quiz shows, gambling, runaway inflation, and Communism.¹⁷ Listeners condemning giveaways linked the genre to lowbrow forms, antisocial behavior, un-American morals, and lack of quality.

The letters to the FCC endorsing giveaways posited quite different discursive links. Supportive listeners highlighted the genre's entertainment value, the hope the programs provided for Americans, and the educational merits of quiz shows. Quiz shows were held up as a legitimate vice, especially when compared to other bad habits; one listener suggested that quiz shows saved her marriage, as the hope of winning kept her husband home instead of in taverns.¹⁸ The genre was explicitly labeled as "wholesome" entertainment in the face of the FCC's accusation of violating lottery laws. Many letters expressed disbelief in the commission's interpretation of the genre as illegal lotteries, as they could not understand how programs could be viewed as gambling; as one listener wrote, "[T]here is no gambling on these programs; those who fail to win never lose anything, for nothing is risked."¹⁹ Listeners regularly cited other types of radio programming as inferior to the pleasures of quiz shows, such as "soap operas, singing commercials, blood & thunder murders, hammy & the most banal performers," romances, violent detective shows, tired comedies, and recorded music.²⁰ Evaluative comparisons between genres mobilized existing hierarchies, such as the cultural stigmas attached to soap operas and recorded programming, to boost the value of quiz shows in comparison.²¹ Thus the quiz show genre became a site of struggle over competing interpretations concerning the issue of program regulation—the FCC and some listeners found the programs in poor taste and violating the edicts of antigambling statutes, while some producers and audience members found this interpretation far-fetched and ill-defined, attempting to regulate what seemed to be primarily a matter of taste.

This debate played out in the legal arena as well. The FCC's case that giveaways were lotteries rested upon the legal definition of a lottery; to violate the lottery laws, contests were required to demonstrate the three aspects of "prize, chance, and consideration."²² While prizes were clearly part of all giveaways and chance was usually the means of selecting contestants, "consideration" was at the crux of the legal debate, referring to what the contestant must furnish in order to win. Traditionally this aspect of the lottery law protected entrants from having to spend money or purchase products in order to win a contest; the FCC offered an extremely broad interpretation of the laws in defining consideration. In addition to the typical requirement "to furnish any money or thing of value" in defining consideration, the FCC's rules broadly defined consideration to include requiring winners to be listening to the program or station, to answer a question whose answer has been given previously on the program or station, and to answer the phone or write a letter to be broadcast or read over the air. The rationale for this broad definition of consideration rested upon the "unique nature of the medium of radio"—since radio was available to listeners free of charge, the "thing of value" furnished by listeners was *listening itself*, making themselves into a commodity for sponsors to purchase. Since the system of commercial broadcasting sells listeners to advertisers, the FCC defined the time spent listening to "free" programming of sufficient value to qualify as consideration.²³ As the FCC noted in its brief to the US Supreme Court, consideration needed to be redefined for radio: "the classic lottery looked to advance cash payments by the participants as the source of profit; the radio give-away looks to the equally material benefits to stations and advertisers from an increased radio audience to be exposed to advertising."²⁴

Legally this was a stretch at best—as former FCC counsel and legal scholar Leonard Marks argued, the commission's definition of consideration was a weak argument to defend in the courts. Marks contended that the true rationale behind the FCC's ban was that they viewed giveaways as violating the "public interest, convenience, and necessity" the commission is mandated to uphold; Marks argued that this would have been a stronger legal argument as well (333–37). Numerous legal briefs from various networks and local stations decried the FCC's interpretation of consideration as well as their general assertion that the genre was not in the public interest, given the overwhelming popularity of the programs. Another often-cited complaint about the FCC's policy was that its rules were so broad as to potentially outlaw the entire genre of the quiz show, including programs giving prizes only to in-studio contestants on the basis of knowledge and skill more than chance.²⁵ While the FCC claimed that these broad definitions of the genre would not be enforced, as the policy was designed only to restrict giveaway programs such as *Stop the Music!*, this instance exemplifies the distinctive material effects that the cultural processes of generic definition and interpretation may have.

ABC led a lawsuit against the FCC's rules, effectively enjoining the policy until it reached the US Supreme Court in 1954. The Court ruled 8–0 (with one absence) in favor of ABC, striking down the FCC's proposed rules. They based their decision upon the commission's inadequate definition of consideration, suggesting that "it would be stretching the [lottery] statute to the breaking point to give it an interpretation that would make such programs a crime."²⁶ The decision, as written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, highlighted that the FCC cannot administer rules based upon their evaluation of a genre's legitimacy: "Regardless of the doubts held by the Commission and others as to the social value of the programs here under consideration, such administrative expansion of §1304 does not provide the remedy."²⁷ The Supreme Court's decision did not attempt to define the genre itself—Warren specifically noted that the debate was not about the value of the programs but about the FCC's jurisdiction in outlawing them—but by making the genre a site of regulatory and legal practice, it helped form the assumption that quiz shows were appropriate realms of policy making, a crucial link for the television scandals.

Even though the FCC's policy was struck down by the courts, the spirit of their action was carried out. The giveaway format died out on radio in the 1950s, as ratings fell and programs designed to clone the success of *Stop the Music!* left the airwaves. As early as 1949, press accounts signaled the decline of the giveaway format:

Nowhere was there a specific cause for the giveaways' decline. Perhaps it had been hastened by publicized difficulties of jackpot winners in their struggles to rid themselves of windfalls which nevertheless subjected them to stiff taxation. Perhaps the novelty had worn off the trick. And perhaps it was simply that the same people who had let dust gather on their mah-jongg tiles from sheer ennui finally had tired of the giveaway. ("Decline and Fall" 43)

While giveaways did not completely disappear from radio (and some made the transition to television in the early 1950s), the FCC's attempts to ban giveaways effectively stigmatized the genre. The discursive circulation of the quiz show, as it transferred to television in the late 1940s and early 1950s, clearly linked cultural legitimacy with the question-centered and stunt dominants rather than big-money giveaways based more on chance than skill.

The quiz show genre that transferred to television primarily featured contestants appearing in studios rather than being called at home, distancing the viewers from active participation in the programs. As the giveaway controversy of the late 1940s posited an opposition between entertaining and buying an audience, the quiz shows of the 1950s explicitly foregrounded their entertainment value. By highlighting the legal and cultural problems with giving away prizes directly to listeners, the FCC and other critics helped shift genre conven-

tions and assumptions of the quiz show in the 1950s, foregrounding entertainment and “legitimate” knowledge. Thus the late-1940s giveaway controversy set two vital precedents for the more well known television scandals: quiz shows were established as sites for public controversy and debate, and quiz shows that emphasized intellectual drama and competitive entertainment were legitimated over giving away prizes to home listeners. While there are no direct causal linkages, it seems clear that as the cultural category of the quiz show shifted toward valuing entertainment and drama, producers worked to highlight these aspects in their televised quiz shows. To regain cultural legitimacy, producers turned toward the question-centered model that had remained comparatively untainted by the FCC’s actions of the late 1940s. Focusing on entertainment pleasures, contestants were featured as characters in the ongoing drama of the quiz; like actors, they often received direction from the programs’ producers, worked on reciting their lines, and took their places within an increasingly staged and controlled form of entertainment. While the FCC certainly did not urge producers to “fix” quiz programs, the meanings of the genre that the FCC’s actions did encourage—legitimate entertainment and competitive drama—pushed the quiz show toward the direction that would eventually result in its most infamous role in media history.

In charting out the various discourses constituting the quiz show genre in the radio era, I have tried to demonstrate how certain assumptions became linked to the genre in ways that would have significant effects during the television scandals. These linkages are not explicitly causal and direct, yet I believe that traditional historical analyses of the scandals have been lacking in part because they have neglected to account for the genre’s prehistory on radio. By charting out how the quiz show genre operated as a cultural category leading up to the scandals, the actions of the television industry and American audience in the 1950s become clearer, as certain generic assumptions had become naturalized and activated prior to the scandals. Particularly we can see that the genre had been established as a site of controversy by the FCC’s actions and subsequent publicity, norms of entertainment and dramatic action had been established as more-validated aspects of quiz shows, and the assumption of fair play was both questioned and reiterated throughout the radio era.

The three dominant modes of the quiz show in the radio era were all vital precedents for the 1950s television quiz show scandals. The initial question-centered quiz show provided the baseline for the genre throughout its history on both radio and television; for the television quizzes of the 1950s, producers drew the cultural assumptions of legitimated social value and entertainment through educational and intellectual competition. Both the stunt and giveaway models provided the 1950s programs clear identities to oppose, defined in contrast to these more devalued and populist formats. Yet the 1950s shows did draw upon both textual conventions (lavish prize packages, contestants returning through

multiple episodes) and cultural assumptions (publicized debates over the genre's value and a tendency toward controversial and regulatory responses) from the giveaway and stunt versions of the radio quiz show. In order to understand the quiz show scandals more fully, we need to acknowledge these linkages, exploring how the scandals did not merely emerge in a generic vacuum, as previous histories have implied. Likewise, we can understand the current boom in prime-time quiz shows as continuing certain assumptions established in the radio era, with *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* drawing from both the legitimated intellectual competition of early quizzes and the "everyman" contestant, huge jackpot, and telephone participation of the giveaway form. Trying to understand a particular moment of any genre's development requires a historical perspective to chart the continuities of precedents and cultural assumptions that may have been constitutive of the genre's longitudinal arc. Very often this process of historicization forces television historians to look backward to the medium's ancestor on radio, a vital cross-medium perspective that is gaining legitimacy among media historians.

Notes

1. The crucial term here is *giveaway*, as the FCC was referring to programs that gave prizes to the listening audience rather than to studio-contained contests, although I discuss this division more in depth below.
2. NBC Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison (henceforth NBC), Radio Scripts, Box 483, Folder 3, "*Quiz Kids*, 1/1/41."
3. Letter from Mrs. Ivan Bishop, Grand Rapids MI, 7 Aug. 1948, FCC Collection, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (henceforth FCC), Docket 9113, Box 3877. See numerous other letters in this file for similar testimonies.
4. Anonymous letter, 11 Aug. 1948, Docket 9113, Box 3877, FCC.
5. Letter from Mrs. A. J. Smith, 19 Aug. 1940, Central Correspondence, Box 78, Folder 55, "Miles Laboratories, 1940," NBC.
6. The only example of a *Truth or Consequences* contestant who would not fulfill his stunt for a prize was a diehard Brooklyn Dodgers fan who refused to defame his team on the radio to win World Series tickets; he was given the tickets for his loyalty nevertheless.
7. *Pot o' Gold* script, Central Correspondence, Box 78, Folder 28, "Lewis-Howe Co., 1940," NBC.
8. Mandated by Section 326 of the Communications Act of 1934; see Emery, 212.
9. Originally the lottery mandate was part of Section 316 of the Communications Act. In 1948 this portion of the act was repealed and a nearly identical ban of broadcast lotteries was incorporated into the US Criminal Code. In 1954 the US Supreme Court held that enforcing this code was a component of the FCC's jurisdiction. See Emery 224–26.
10. Numerous memos to this effect can be found in Box 151, Folder 21–3 (1935–46), FCC.
11. See Barnouw, for a discussion of the Blue Book and the regulatory climate of the late 1940s.
12. Memo from James Lawrence Fly, chairman, to Harry Bannister, general manager of WWJ, Detroit, 27 Mar. 1944, Box 151, Folder 21–3 (1935–46), FCC.
13. Brief by Louis Cowan Productions, Docket 9113, Box 3877, FCC.
14. Letters held in Docket 9113, Boxes 3877–79, FCC.

15. Card from Mrs. C. W. Creely, Bronx, NY, 27 Sept. 1948, Docket 9113, Box 3877, FCC.
16. Letter from Theodore Badgley, Montclair, NJ, 15 Nov. 1948, Docket 9113, Box 3877, FCC.
17. See various letters in Docket 9113, Boxes 3877–78, FCC.
18. Letter from Mrs. Ivan Bishop, Grand Rapids, MI, 7 Aug. 1948, Docket 9113, Box 3877, FCC.
19. Letter from R. Stuart Hume, Middletown, NY, 7 Aug. 1948, Docket 9113, Box 3877, FCC.
20. Letter from William Potter, Schenectady, NY, 25 Sept. 1948, Docket 9113, Box 3877, FCC; see other letters in this box for similar assertions.
21. See Allen, Hilmes, for discussions of the cultural value of radio soap operas. See Barnouw 109–10, 216–18 for a discussion of the antirecording stigma on early radio.
22. See Marks for a detailed discussion of the legal definitions of lotteries and giveaways.
23. FCC ruling, “Broadcast of Lottery Information,” in Docket 9113, Box 3877, FCC. The disputed license renewal of WARL, concerning their giveaway *Dollars for Answers*, set the precedent for this broad reading of consideration; see Docket 8559, Box 3423—Northern Virginia Broadcasters, Inc., WARL, FCC. See also Marks, 328–33.
24. Quoted in *Federal Communications Commission v. American Broadcasting Company*, 347 US 284; 74 S. Ct. 593; 1954 US LEXIS 2674; 98 L. Ed. 699 (henceforth *FCC v. ABC*).
25. Various briefs, Docket 9113, Boxes 3877–79, FCC.
26. *FCC v. ABC*.
27. *Ibid.*; §1304 refers to the section of the United States Criminal Code that contained the antilottery statute, after it had been removed from the Communications Act.

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CHAPTER 16**“THE CASE OF THE RADIO-ACTIVE
HOUSEWIFE”****Relocating Radio in the Age of Television**

Jennifer Hyland Wang

IN THE 1950S McCANN-ERICKSON INC. developed a brochure to sell market research to Madison Avenue admen. The brochure, entitled “The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife,” featured a fictional advertising man, Dan Decimalpoint, charged with investigating the rumor that the American housewife was “radio-active.” In this ad Mr. Decimalpoint solves the case by hiring McCann-Erickson to assess the daytime listening habits of “the gals who make home and family their career.”¹ Through a scientific survey Mr. Decimalpoint discovers that Mrs. Average Housewife is a consistent and loyal radio listener and recommends to his colleagues that advertisers invest heavily in daytime radio to attract her attention.

Expressing the difficulties faced by ad executives in determining the behavior of female consumers, “The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife” offered post-war advertising men a fantasy vision of themselves and a reassuring picture of the female audiences sought by sponsors. Relying on research to understand the female audience, Dan Decimalpoint is depicted in the brochure as a man in control, enjoying life as a Hugh Hefner-esque playboy—vacationing in Florida, drinking martinis, relaxing at the office, and admiring his secretary’s voluptuous figure—while McCann-Erickson conducts its analysis of the daytime radio audience. In page after page this ad executive is presented as a man free of the demands of his job and master of all he surveys. This sentiment is revealed most explicitly by the front cover; it features a cut-out picture window with half-open blinds, a piece of red filter paper behind it to symbolize a red light from a

woman's bedroom, and the silhouette of a woman's body. In the hands of an ad man, this cover illustrated his power to survey not only female personnel in their offices but "radio-active housewives" across America.

During the transition from network radio to network television in the Cold War era, the brochure was an effective selling tool. It not only promised to solve the ad agency's market research problem but eased the fears of postwar admen, showing them that the elusive daytime female audience was easily viewed and under their control. This pamphlet thus documents the anxieties of postwar advertising men during this industrial transition and the extent to which definitions of masculinity and sexual power were inextricably tied to their understanding of female consumers. Ultimately, however, "The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife" reveals how industrial conceptions of the daytime female audience influenced the development of broadcast industries and shaped the practices of advertising agencies, sponsors, and network executives.

In recent years media historians have analyzed the introduction of television in the postwar era and investigated its discursive impact on American culture. The emergence of television has been a popular topic for academics; for example, scholars such as William Boddy and Lynn Spigel have written about the economic and regulatory development of the television industry and the domestication of television in postwar American homes (Boddy, *Fifties Television*; Spigel). Few media studies have given radio in the early Cold War period the same intellectual scrutiny. Even recent historical studies of radio's cultural impact, such as Michele Hilmes's *Radio Voices*, conclude where television presumably begins: the end of World War II. The few accounts of radio's life in postwar America focus on the origins of future programming and industrial trends—the development of FM, the discovery of the teen market, the convergence of rock and roll with radio—and not on the competition between radio and television for the attention of postwar audiences or the demise of traditional network programming such as daytime serials.² In fact, the only work to record in some depth the postwar fate of one of the most popular forms of radio programming, the daytime soap opera, was George Willey's 1961 article "End of an Era: The Daytime Radio Serial."³ But, more important, many analyses of postwar media have failed to interrogate the narratives propounded by traditional scholars about the "golden age" of television—the postwar indifference to network radio and the smooth ascendancy of television as a great mass medium.

In this essay I address some of these gaps in media scholarship by analyzing radio's struggle for survival during the "golden age" of television. In particular, I focus on how ideas about female radio and television audiences affected the viability of daytime radio and the development of daytime television. Based on industrial discourses in trade magazines and archival material from roughly 1948 to 1960, this essay briefly examines the struggle among advertising men, sponsors, and broadcasters to negotiate the transition from network radio to tel-

evision. Studying the professional anxieties and industrial tensions revealed by advertising men and sponsors in publications such as *Sponsor*, a magazine for buyers of broadcast advertising, I investigate how their fears about the impact of television, the power of radio, the public relations crisis enveloping the television industry, and the unpredictable behavior of modern housewives informed the transition from one medium to the other.

Interrogating the assumptions and discourses of industry personnel, I argue that the transition to daytime television was neither simple and preordained nor determined exclusively by economic conditions. The industry's acceptance of television was a more complicated and anxiety-ridden process than has previously been understood. Throughout this period, many advertising men fought to sell sponsors on the benefits of radio and broadcasters struggled to maintain daytime radio profits and to ensure the commercial development of the television industry. Ultimately, what this essay reveals is the extent to which gender norms affected industrial practices, influenced corporate knowledge about its audiences, and shaped broadcasting industries. By analyzing the gendered and sexual discourses employed by those in the industry to understand the impact of media technologies on the business of broadcasting, this essay uncovers how industry personnel used gender to manage tensions between broadcasters' public service obligations and their commercial needs, between rational advertising men and TV-dazzled sponsors, and between continued support for daytime radio (and its culturally derided serials) and substantial development of new forms of daytime television programming.

"Explosive Instruments": Radio Criticism and Public Service Obligations of a New Mass Medium

Radio and television, like atomic energy, are explosive instruments. Our cultural survival depends, in no small measure, upon their proper use.

—Charles Siepmann

In the immediate postwar era a variety of industry critics including Charles Siepmann and Llewellyn White linked the political imperatives of the Cold War and the volatility of atomic energy to the appropriate development and use of broadcasting industries. As evidenced by the Atomic Age references in "The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife," the ability to control the mass media and to manage the media consumption of postwar audiences assumed national importance. As radio became a national medium in the 1930s, it became the target of cultural critics, intellectuals, women's clubs, and listeners' groups who charged radio with failing to serve the interests of all Americans. Influenced by the effectiveness of radio propaganda against the Allies during World War II, critics recognized radio's importance in maintaining a free society; as Charles

Siepmann declared in his book *Radio's Second Chance* (1946), "[T]he state of a nation's radio is a measure of that nation's democratic health" (x). In light of the lessons of World War II, radio criticism only intensified in the postwar era.

In the late 1940s industry executives, media consultants, intellectuals, and writers such as Gilbert Seldes, Charles Siepmann, John Crosby, Jack Gould, Albert Williams, Llewellyn White, and Norman Corwin appealed for radio reform in a variety of national publications and popular books. While cultural elites aired a variety of complaints against radio broadcasters (too few sustained programs, a lack of diversity in sponsored programs, and limited public affairs coverage), their main grievance was the "unchecked commercialism" of radio (Crosby 24). In the face of a conflict between the "competitive pursuit of profits and the collective concern of all radio licensees with serving the public interest," critics charged that radio had privileged profits over public service (Siepmann, *Radio, Television*, 55). Particularly, critics protested the nearly exclusive control of advertising agencies and sponsors over the production of programming. These writers complained that in 1943 over 97% of radio programming was controlled by advertisers and over 60% of network billings for NBC and CBS came from just ten advertising agencies (Stamps 336). To satiate their greed, critics argued, both local and network broadcasters had abdicated their programming responsibilities to commercial sponsors, "[sitting] back passive as Buddhas accepting fat checks and letting the agents of soap and cereal manufacturers romp at will on the ether" (Swezey 5). Indeed, Albert N. Williams lamented in January 1947 that

radio is not, today, any of the things it was born to be. It is not operated in the public interest. It is operated in the specific interest of a handful of patent medicine makers, soap chemists, and tobacco curers. . . . It is only an educational, political, and social force after the salesmen have enjoyed their sport. (Williams 25)

But radio, the writer John Crosby argued, "presents its sorriest spectacle in the daytime" (Crosby 28). Critics viewed the wartime proliferation of daytime serials as proof of the rampant commercialism of American radio and of the networks' indifference to the public's interest. Sponsors' nearly exclusive hold on daytime network radio, they maintained, was responsible for the most egregious examples of advertising excess and poor taste—the soap opera. Daytime serials were cheap, convenient vehicles for advertising messages targeted at female "addicts" with low IQs and even lower sales resistance. Critics charged large manufacturers with filling the daytime air with emotionally draining stories designed to sell goods to an impressionable female audience (Siepmann, *Radio's Second*, 59). This point was not lost on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which lambasted radio broadcasters for the poor quality of their daytime programs and their failure to serve other sections of the daytime audience (Crosby 25).



"The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife, 1959." Courtesy Library of American Broadcasting.

Optimistic predictions about the public service potential of television did not ease the worries of radio's most vocal postwar critics. Radio analysts feared the influence of commercialism on this young medium. In his 1946 article "Television: Boon or Bane?" Jack Gould warned that already "television has started down radio's path" (317). Although "the coming of television provides a propitious moment for the radio man to 'save face' and recapture his soul," Gould claimed that the networks had already begun to delegate the responsibility for television production to the nation's advertising agencies (319). Given its potential visual power, television, he suggested, might well be "a menace of frightening proportions to American culture" (314).

Given the economics of the young television industry, the fears of radio critics were well founded. In the early postwar period television was at a vulnerable point in its development. The networks needed capital to develop the television industry, and they found this money in network radio. In its formative years, the growth of television was fueled by advertiser investment in commercial radio programs (particularly the culturally derided but immensely profitable daytime serials). Yet the future of the television industry was also dependent upon sell-

ing television to American consumers and advertisers (Boddy, "Building" 63–89). Because of the severe economic pressure on networks and advertisers, critics such as Jack Gould worried that "there will be every incentive to cut corners in regard to preserving the medium's integrity if badly-needed income is thereby obtained" (Gould 317). By 1950 it seemed that their predictions were coming true. To subsidize substantial deficits and to encourage the participation of sponsors, some networks and stations cut their investments in sustaining programming and privileged profitable sponsored programs in their schedules.

Although the FCC had been accused previously of regulatory inaction in their supervision of radio, the government had shown greater interest in television's development, overseeing the distribution of television licenses, UHF and VHF assignments, technical color standards, and the violent and sexual content of early television programming. In the immediate postwar era, the FCC did not seem pleased with the early financial development of the medium. Echoing the concerns of critics, FCC chairman Wayne Coy warned broadcasters in 1948 to contain their commercial impulses:

[A]s this mighty force expands week by week and month by month and competition becomes keener and keener, the days of temptation will come. Now is the time to recognize this danger and to resolve that undesirable practices shall never secure a foothold on this new dimension in our lives. . . . The American home is not a nightclub. It is not a theater. It is not a midway. . . . If you take precautions now not to be tempted to the primrose path, you will be saving this art from excesses, the remorse, the clamor for reform, the struggles for redemption that plague, in varying degrees, almost every other form of communication. (Siepmann, *Radio, Television*, 335)

In the early to mid-1950s broadcasters were thus caught between their desperate need to finance the television industry and their public service responsibilities. In the midst of vocal criticism of radio and the young television industry and fears of government intervention, broadcasters worked diligently to protect their investment in the new medium and to establish a public identity for television different from that of commercial radio. The dilemma that broadcasters faced in the 1950s was not new. In her examination of the early radio industry, *Radio Voices*, Michele Hilmes analyzes how the industry handled a similar public relations crisis in the early 1930s. Between 1928 and 1937, Robert McChesney argues, educational broadcasters launched a public campaign to question the commercial underpinnings of the newly emerging radio industry. At the same time, commercial broadcasters sought to establish programming formats, to consolidate their control of American radio, and to exploit their primary target for advertising messages—female consumers of household goods. Fearing government restrictions on commercial practices, radio broadcasters sought to bal-

ance their need to program for profit with their obligation to program for public service.

Radio's solution in the 1930s to the conflict between its public image and its commercial desires exposes the importance of gender in the development of the American broadcasting industry. Early radio broadcasters differentiated the radio schedule by gender, creating a divide between prime time and daytime. In the morning and afternoon, the airwaves were packed with "women's programs"—daytime serials, chat shows, and homemaking programs—sponsored by large manufacturers. These culturally disparaged and commercially profitable programming forms directed at lower- to middle-class housewives were thus "hidden" from the view of FCC commissioners, social critics, and upper-class clubwomen. Separate and distinct from the world of daytime, nighttime schedules were cleared of any "female-oriented" programming. Hilmes argues that nighttime schedules, aimed at a "critical audience of [male] public decision makers," were filled with prestigious commercial productions, high-priced comedy teams, and serious sustaining programs ("Desired" 28). To improve their image, Hilmes writes, broadcasters contained the devalued feminine programming forms that raised the ire of critics and thus protected their commercial practices (29).

The public relations crisis of the 1930s and Hilmes's analysis of the industry's solution to this dilemma provide a historical and theoretical context for understanding the transition from radio to television in the 1950s. When public image became important to the growth of the new medium and television needed to accumulate sufficient audiences to attract advertisers, similar industry tensions emerged. Just as assumptions about gender were used to shape radio, gender also shaped the development of television, influencing industry perceptions of the crisis, beliefs about radio and television audiences, and attempts to balance its public and private responsibilities. The extent to which gender influenced the development of television is exhibited by the struggle of sponsors and advertising men in the postwar era to maintain the financial stature of radio and to make television commercially viable. These industry personnel, the main agents of commercialism, labored to obscure the profits and programs essential to the growth of television and to highlight a prestigious public image for the new medium. As expressed in early industry discourse, sponsors, advertising agencies, and broadcasters used gender and class, among other social axes, to differentiate the two media; radio became the site for commercial female programming targeted at a lower- to middle-class serial listener, and nighttime television became the place for prestige, quality programming aimed at a family audience.

Daytime television emerged from this context, from the contradictory and strategic gendering of industrial discourses and audiences around the transition from radio to television. The anxiety of this transition was palpable. Who would listen to daytime radio and who would watch daytime television? Would house-

wives watch enough daytime television to make radio's split between daytime and prime time feasible for television? By analyzing the discourse of industry players during this transition, the next section of this essay exposes broadcasting's investment in maintaining strict boundaries between gendered audiences, programs, and day parts, and reveals how difficult it was for sponsors, advertising men, and network executives to meet this challenge.

The Case of the Sex-Bedazzled Sponsor: Industrial Tension in the Birth of Television

There can be no doubt that television's glamour has captured not only the minds of consumers at home, but also advertising managers in their offices.

—“*The Case for Use of Radio by Department Stores*”

Although television was first introduced to the US public at the 1939 World's Fair, the development of daytime network television was delayed until the early 1950s. Broadcasters, advertising agencies, and sponsors worried whether American housewives, who consumed a steady diet of radio serials, could incorporate daily television viewing into their household schedule. In the early days of station operation, some daytime hours were filled by local programming that tried to lure homemakers with shopping or cooking demonstrations, interview-service shows, audience participation programs, or movies. While WABD, the Du Mont network's New York affiliate, was the first station to offer regular daytime programming in November 1948, daytime network programming on CBS and NBC remained sporadic, generally limited to two hours a day. By late 1950 and early 1951, after prime-time commercial time became scarce, daytime television began to draw the interest of major sponsors such as Procter and Gamble. Networks then started to expand their daytime schedule with more prestigious, celebrity-driven variety shows, including NBC's *The Kate Smith Show* and CBS's *The Garry Moore Show*. Between 1952 and 1954 networks developed and standardized their daytime schedule, offering affiliates nearly nineteen hours of personality shows, audience participation programs, and soap operas (I. McChesney 73–83).

By 1954 *Broadcasting-Telecasting* triumphantly, if somewhat prematurely, declared the transition from daytime radio to daytime television to be nearly complete: “the American family, especially the American Housewife, has taken to daytime television even at 7 A.M. as it has taken to every other device for making life easier and more pleasant” (“Daytime Television” 76). Yet despite regular reports of its death, radio, particularly daytime radio, thrived in the postwar era. Radio soap operas, widely popular during the war, remained profitable throughout this era. In the early to mid-1950s daytime serials were resilient, leading the Nielsen ratings and maintaining legions of female fans (Stedman 393–94).

Although significant effort was put into the development of daytime television between 1952 and 1954, it was not until 1955 that networks began to excise radio soap operas from their daytime schedule (Willey 102), and only on 25 November 1960 did serials finally disappear altogether from network radio.

Thus after World War II advertising men and sponsors were far from certain which medium—radio or television—would eventually dominate. Although early industrial discourses suggested that the two media would likely complement each other, it was unclear by the late 1940s whether both media would find a place in American homes.⁴ While the U.S. Department of Commerce promised in 1949 that "television, as an advertising medium, [would] create new desires and needs and together with all other advertising media, [would] help industry move a far greater volume of goods than ever before," other advertising executives predicted that the frenzy over the coming of television was much ado about nothing.⁵ For example, in 1944 a leading adman in J. Walter Thompson's Radio Department predicted that television's weaknesses—its demand for audience attention and its lack of imagination—would prevent it from being "the world force radio is."⁶ These predictions were bolstered by public interest in radio. Studies showed that in 1949 the number of homes with a radio grew to a record forty million, radio listening increased significantly, and the sale of radio sets skyrocketed ("U.S. Radio" 22, 58).⁷ However, despite the growth in radio, more than a quarter of Americans surveyed that same year believed that television would certainly "kill radio."⁸

Although there was uncertainty about the effect of television on radio's broadcasting sovereignty, industry magazines and network advertisements promised riches to those advertisers and broadcasters who could predict the fate of either medium. In July 1949 *Fortune* magazine argued that although "never before in history have so many men lost so much money so fast *and so willingly*" in snapping up available prime time television slots, the buying frenzy in prime-time television seemed worth it; *Fortune* reminded sponsors that, "every projection made in the past two years of TV's growth, no matter how optimistic, has been exceeded."⁹ In 1951 a CBS advertisement entitled "Profits for Prophets" predicted that there "will be some sad advertisers who didn't read the tea leaves right" in hesitating for even a moment to sponsor network daytime television (CBS, "Profits" 19).

The pressure to forecast the future of radio and television escalated tensions between sponsors and advertising agencies. Those in the industry had little reliable scientific evidence to back up any early conclusions about the direction of either media. Advertising agencies believed that radio had been a reliable producer for sponsors over the past three decades, providing a consistent revenue stream and a stable base of female listeners well known to advertisers. Despite the excitement of the new medium, television was a gamble for ad execs and sponsors, who struggled to predict how many families would purchase television

sets, how television would change women's radio habits, and if women would watch television during the day. The professional anxieties of admen and sponsors were stirred by this industrial transition and were only increased by their dependence on the behavior of American homemakers. As William Boddy has discussed, the development of commercial television relied largely on the American housewife as the "household purchasing agent" and a primary target of advertising messages (*Fifties* 20). The growth of television relied on "the degree to which housewives would drop their housework to watch television during the daytime" and the extent to which advertising agencies could discern women's viewing behavior and convince housewives to change their habits (qtd. in Boddy, *Fifties* 20). As described by Michele Hilmes, women

became the audience at once most desired and feared in the structure of broadcasting: desired because their participation was central to the basic functioning of the institution, especially as it was colonized by the program production departments of major advertising agencies, yet feared because they occupied a discursive space linked to threatening concepts of the irrational, passive, emotional, and culturally suspect "masses." ("Desired" 19)

It was this potential conversion of female radio listeners into television viewers that would fuel the development of prime-time television. In an industrial and political context in which commercial programming aimed at women was carefully scrutinized, the industry's need for female viewers disrupted the neat gender binaries established in early radio. The challenge for advertising executives and sponsors was not only who was brave enough to predict the future of television but who was "bold enough to gamble on the unpredictability of a woman" ("How TV" 26).

Advertising agencies and trade magazines, fearful of the volatility of the television market and traditionally dependent on radio income, blamed television for straining the long-term marriages of advertising executives and their clients. Advertising men were conflicted about entering the television market in the late 1940s. Networks urged advertisers to invest money in television and to experiment with new programming forms. At the same time, it was unclear if television could provide adequate coverage and thus an appropriate sales return for the average sponsor. Although early postwar industry journals questioned whether television would ever be a prestigious medium like nighttime radio, by 1949 entry into prime-time television soon became a marker of prestige and showmanship for both advertising men and sponsors ("Prestige" 32, 69; Peterson, "Television" 78). Drawn to the "show business' feeling when they get into big-time TV," sponsors raced to subsidize prime-time variety shows and anthology dramas, often against the advice of their advertising agencies ("Why Are" 24). In an August 1951 article, "Why Are So Many Sponsors Changing Agencies Now?"

Sponsor magazine reported that the "'divorce rate' between sponsors and ad agencies has grown alarmingly high" (23) and that "nearly all of the admen quizzed by *Sponsor* listed one thing as being a major or minor motivating factor in virtually all of the recent outstanding agency-client splitups: Television" (24). In fact, said *Sponsor*, "TV's abilities to break up the longest-standing agency-client acts can only be compared to the kind of unrest created by Delilah on one of her better days" (24). Jilted advertisers believed that television was a "home-wrecker" who had encouraged big-budget sponsors to stray from solid investments in radio and the sound advice of ad men.

Television's power to influence business was sexualized in trade discourse. Television was depicted in the industry press as a sexual vamp, a glamorous siren charming sponsors out of their advertising money. Jealous admen complained that sponsors could not resist the temptation of television. Television, they said, was "an alluring new glamour doll" that could ensnare vulnerable clients; in comparison, radio was increasingly identified by sponsors as little more attractive than "an old-fashioned country cousin" ("They're Coming" 35). Much of this discourse, the description of television as a seductive, glamorous woman, was linked to discourses about television's visual impact. A potent example of the sexual power of television over men was a 1949 trade ad for Du Mont daytime television; in this ad television turns the neighborhood men—the milkman, a neighborhood boy, and the iceman—all into Peeping Toms ("For Daytime" 13). As Elaine Tyler May has written, fears of the hydrogen bomb were discursively linked in this period to anxieties about 1950s female sexuality (93). When advertising agencies were apprehensive about the influence of a new technology on their business, it's not a coincidence that worries about the seductive power of television surfaced. It is also not surprising that the inability of advertisers to manage their relationships with sponsors and to manage the commercial transition from radio to television was expressed as sexual chaos.

In the trade press, advertising agencies blamed sponsors for falling head over heels for television glamour. Both networks and admen, who benefited from continued sponsorship in radio as well as new investment in television, believed they were "under fire from TV-Dazzled radio sponsors" ("Is Dropping" 28). *Sponsor* magazine featured in-depth accounts of major sponsors, enchanted with nighttime television, who suddenly dropped hard-selling, profitable daytime radio programs ("How Rinso" 29). Ad execs also characterized sponsors as weak men, easily manipulated by wives, social peers, and prime-time talent. In a 1950 article entitled "What Agencies Would Tell Clients . . . If They Dared" advertising executives complained bitterly about sponsors who allowed their social-climbing wives and golf buddies to influence their advertising budgets (19+). Sex-bedazzled sponsors, ad executives claimed, also fell prey to the glamorous talent in their television programs. In a condescending 1951 article called "Kindergarten for Sponsors," advertisers shared cautionary tales of naive, "sex



**for
daytime
television
see
Du Mont**

If you want to reach the housewife, daytime television must occupy an increasingly important place in your plans. Daytime television is doing a job for many advertisers, at a very modest cost. Surveys show that when television comes into the home, radio is neglected* — and the television antennas are sprouting thick as corn in Kansas. Du Mont is your logical contact on daytime television, because: Du Mont pioneered daytime television. Du Mont has developed the daytime programs. Du Mont has the daytime network coverage.

**We would like to furnish you these facts. Write or phone the Du Mont Network Research Department.*



America's Window on the World

©1949 CH 1 BY ALLEN B. DUMONT LABORATORIES, INC.

515 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Phone MUrray Hill 8-2600

15 AUGUST 1949

13

Dumont Television Advertisement, 1949. Courtesy Library of American Broadcasting.

bewitched" sponsors who failed to realize that any sexual magnetism they suddenly possessed had come "strictly from [their] checkbook" (24). Here, sponsors were clearly characterized as unfaithful men, unknowingly enticed by television's sex appeal.

Advertising personnel also blamed sponsors' business insecurities and psychological vulnerabilities for driving investment into television. Sponsors were, some admen claimed, "buying into TV in order to keep up with the Joneses" ("They're Coming" 35). Because of significant network rates and high TV production costs, prime-time television priced out most smaller advertisers. Larger sponsors, or smaller clients who hoped to be major sponsors, sometimes broke their advertising budget to fund prime-time spectacles. Sensitive to their status in the industry, some sponsors also feared being associated with a declining medium. As one advertising manager explained, "TV's the thing, radio is going down, therefore buy television" ("Why Sponsors Are Cold" 63). Advertising agencies also criticized sponsors publicly for allowing their personal preferences and prejudices to shape corporate decisions. Sponsors were, in the words of one advertising executive, "excited by the presence of a TV set in their own homes"; this excitement, the feeling that you were "in show business" when you sponsored a TV show, drove sponsors to "snatch up a franchise on the best available TV evening time" ("They're Coming" 35). As described by Mark Woods, vice chairman of ABC, sponsors' "non-scientific" selection of media advertising was shaped too often by their personal practices; clients would tell him:

Woods, we don't listen to the radio any more. When I get home, after dinner I tune on the television and I am there until 11 o'clock. . . .

But radio, I never turn it on. . . . Now, I am spending millions of dollars with you in radio. Why should I?¹⁰

Thus, in trade discourse, sponsors were presented as dazed by prime-time glamour and swayed by social one-upmanship. Advertisers argued that it was their clients' emotions and insecurities, not their business judgment, that drove their infatuation with television. To advertisers, sponsors were clearly not thinking rationally and clearly, like a man.

In this period, the feminization of television and the portrayal of sponsors as vulnerable to female influence reveal deeper industrial tensions on the part of admen who were responsible for the smooth commercial transition to television and for the growth of their clients' sales reports. Some sponsors' eagerness to rush the transition, to fund experimental prime-time spectacles, and to cancel daytime radio contracts disrupted the industrial status quo and the gender norms in place since the consolidation of the radio industry. The interest of big-budget sponsors in television also threatened to expose the commercialism that was necessary to the growth of the new medium but which had to be hidden from media critics and FCC commissioners. The feminization of television

expresses the ad agencies' conflicted position vis-à-vis the commercialization of television; while admen trumpeted female attraction to television to encourage sponsor investment, they also had to rein in the commercial impulses of sponsors and limit television's association with American housewives. Intersecting with Cold War discourses linking national strength to a masculinity able to channel female sexual energy, the broadcast industry's gendered allusions highlighted the danger "irrational" sponsors posed to the proper development of television (Wang 11). It was from this industrial climate of sexual chaos and gender disruption that the postwar future for daytime media and their female audiences was mapped.

"Talking the Language of the Pasha": What Is the Value of Daytime Radio?

There shouldn't be any daytime TV just as there shouldn't be any nighttime radio. I don't think it will happen, but it would benefit all segments: the industry, the advertiser, and the public. . . . And if you quote me I'll deny every word!

—Comments of a network president, 23 March 1953

In the industry press, advertising agencies pleaded with sponsors for more "rational" advertising expenditures in radio and television. As one advertising manager suggested in 1949, "we have gone far beyond the point . . . where you go into television for glamour or prestige reasons" ("Radio Is Getting Better" 44). Ad execs were still advocating a "more sober approach" to radio sponsorship (31); as one ad executive remarked, it is hardly "intelligent to drop the medium [of radio] in a flurry of emotion" ("They're Coming" 35, 58). Unlike their emotional, irrational clients, admen characterized themselves as rational, objective specialists in the mass media guided only by training, available scientific research, and sound business judgment.¹¹ One agency man argued that

the way we choose media is completely objective . . . we buy [advertising] space like a doctor prescribes medicine. He prescribes what is good for the patient, and it has nothing to do with what he thinks about it at all. It's almost a mathematical formula for the advertising man. (Lapica 88)

To prove the logic of their "scientific" approach, a December 1951 issue of *Sponsor* presented a wacky fictional tale about a Martian named Inocram (*Marconi* spelled backward) who invented radio. When Inocram's invention began to take off, Martian TV broadcasters quickly predicted the demise of television in the face of this new technology. It was not until a wise old Martian conducted a person-to-person survey of radio and television users that some reliable evidence was brought to the debate. Once the audience and its behavior were

known, the story ended happily, with the old Martian appointed president of a large Martian advertising agency ("How Is Radio" 25). Presumably this same approach, as exhibited in the pamphlet "The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife," would ease tensions between ad agencies and sponsors and stabilize investment in both media on Earth.

Advertising executives urged sponsors to reconsider their abandonment of radio. Every few months throughout this early postwar period, *Sponsor* publicized the vitality of network radio.¹² In special features, *Sponsor* trumpeted the moves of major sponsors who had "strip[ped] emotionalism from the media picture and start[ed] using mathematics . . . [to] see how much more economical radio [was] than magazines, newspapers, or television" ("What Your Dollar" 79). To sponsors who had adopted a more "balanced" approach to their media diet—some daytime radio along with their prime-time television—the advertising industry promised redemption for past sins ("They're Coming" 24+). Admen suggested that straying sponsors would be welcomed back to radio with open arms despite their infidelity. For example, to describe the Quaker Oats Company in 1951, *Sponsor* wrote:

[I]t looked as though the Windy City's AM stalwart was deserting radio after a long and happy marriage. This fall, though, the multi-millionaire Quaker gentleman has had a change of heart. The sponsor is still romancing TV, but it's also returned to radio with a lineup of four shows. ("Why Sponsors Are Turning" 27)

Constantly looking for new ways to conceptualize the utility of radio, ad agencies' (and *Sponsor*'s) strategy was to convince clients that radio was a mature and powerful selling medium. Television was sometimes described as an immature medium, represented in trade discourse as a growing boy, a little brother fighting for the "right to wear long pants" ("Brand" 36). Meanwhile, trade magazines argued that radio had proved its manhood in postwar society by its sheer selling impact ("Network Radio" 46–47). For example, a 1951 advertisement for the CBS radio network read: "[T]he big advertisers know better than anybody that you don't send a boy to do a man's work. When there's a big job to be done, you'll want radio" (46–47). By analogy, advertisers suggested that sponsors could reinvigorate their commercial campaigns and redeem their masculinity through radio sponsorship.

Advertising agencies used recent statistics and research in trade magazines to support the salesmanship of radio, particularly the power of daytime radio. Nearly thirty-six thousand TV sets had been sold by 1951, but advertisers declared that television had "not killed off radio listening" ("What Are" 39). What television did was to move radio out of America's living rooms and into women's kitchens. As reported, 77% of all radio listening in TV-owning homes was done with "secondary sets" throughout the house and in cars, and nearly

50% of all radio listening took place in kitchens (39). Advertising and network executives argued that “the woman of the house is now radio’s greatest customer” (39). Tapping into wartime discourses about radio’s talent for personalized selling, the trade press emphasized radio’s power to aim advertising messages at specific individuals (Hill 368–70). Unlike television, *Sponsor* argued, “radio does not broadcast to a crowd” (“Out-of-Home” 54). The intimacy of the medium and the frequency of its address made radio an efficient and effective vehicle for delivering messages to consumers. As one general manager expressed to *Sponsor*, radio was

an instrument for directing into the home, undiluted in any way, the dynamic, emotion-packed element of sound—the sound of the human voice, the sound of music, the myriad sounds of the entire world, the sounds of reality, and, what is tremendously important, the sounds of unreality, of the ethereal, the sounds that an imaginative mind can use to conjure countless, wonderful [ad] impressions. (“Radio Station” 74)

Daytime radio was particularly effective, as reported in a 1955 CBS pamphlet, because its sounds could “follow housewives everywhere . . . through the various rooms of their homes and into their automobiles” as they did their daily housework.¹³ CBS joined advertising agencies in proclaiming radio’s advantage over daytime television: “weekdays, a housewife is mostly on her feet and on the go. There’s just one advertising medium that can reach her continuously . . . just one she can pay attention to continuously. Radio” (CBS, “Nobody’s Listening” 80–81). Daytime radio, unlike daytime television, was a medium that would clearly fit into a housewife’s day.

Radio was also praised in trade discourse for “its ability to reach housewives *while they are engaged in routine homemaking activities.*”¹⁴ As argued by an AM radio sales company, radio was a “point of use” medium; wafting through her kitchen, radio programs could “sell a food product to a woman when her mind is on food . . . a furniture polish while she’s polishing furniture . . . a spray starch to a woman while she’s ironing.”¹⁵ It was the only medium, the industry claimed, that could reach women at their workplace. Mark Woods, vice chairman of ABC, declared that

among all advertising media, radio and only radio reaches people while they are at work. This unique quality alone means that radio can never be displaced. For example, daytime radio reaches the housewife, the purchasing agent of America, during her business hours, and in her office. She is usually alone, not distracted by other persons in the household. She hears one voice, her radio, while she works.”¹⁶

Given the frequency of serials’ daily address to women, radio could thus send its sales messages to women continuously in “easy, aural doses” (“Spot Radio” 78).

The power of radio to whisper messages to housewives was best expressed to industry personnel in a 1957 trade advertisement. This ad, entitled "The Harem Which Listened and Listened," offered sponsors and advertisers a fantastic tale of a pasha who controlled a harem of women (Edward Petry and Co. 74). As the story goes, an interested young man tried several strategies to entice some of the women out of the pasha's harem: choice baubles (or premiums), convincing notes (sales pitches), and handsome pictures of himself (television). Frustrated with his inability to get their attention, the young man asked the pasha for his secret in attracting women. The pasha answered that while he kept them busy with work—"ironing veils, cooking goodies for me, [and] fluffing my cushions"—he also talked to them incessantly as they did their daily chores (74). He talked to them so much, said the pasha, that they were immune to other enticements. The moral of the advertisement was "Some Ladies listen and listen and like it. You, too, can talk the Language of the Pasha with Radio" (74). Conjuring visions of dutiful housewives slaving contentedly in suburban harems, enraptured by the radio voices coming into their homes, this ad imagined a world controlled by advertising men. This ad "sold" them the power to control female consumers through the media. Amidst the uncertainty and anxieties of the industry in the postwar era, this fantasy was surely a reassuring vision.

As revealed by depictions of the daytime radio audience in trade discourse and network advertisements, ad men believed they had a secure business relationship with female radio listeners and daytime radio. Postwar ideas about female radio listeners are indebted to wartime discourses about impressionable serial fans. For example, in 1944 a J. Walter Thompson advertising man described the attraction of radio soap operas to a female wartime audience:

soap operas permit a housekeeper to go about her work while listening to stories tacitly presented as true. As she works, the characters she hears, and hears about, are fitted into her experience. These characters are made to resemble, in her mind, her neighbors and friends. The town in which the action occurs begins to take on the geography of some town she knows. And the incidents, if not exactly like incidents in her life, become in some way related to her, especially the romantic ones. Thus she becomes part of the thing, and as such is a much more receptive audience to the commercial plug.¹⁷

Although contemporary social scientific research contradicted this characterization, the female serial listener was identified in trade and critical discourse as less cultured and less educated than other media audiences, and therefore more easily influenced.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, then, the female radio fan was represented in the press as a loyal, lonely listener, devoted to her favorite programs, and faithful to her constant home companion, the radio. This is how it was presented in one advertising pamphlet:

A Fable



The Harem Which Listened and Listened

Once upon a time there was a Young Man who wanted to entice a couple of Ladies out of the Harem of the Pasha. First he dangled Baubles at the window and they were real choice baubles, too. But nobody inside paid any attention. So he slipped Notes under the door and they were real convincing notes, too. But nobody inside paid any attention. Then he smuggled in some autographed pictures of himself and they were real handsome pictures, too. But nobody inside paid any attention. Defeated, he presented himself before the Pasha seeking, with disarming frankness, to learn the Pasha's secret. "Simple," said the Pasha, "I Keep talking and they Keep listening, so your act lays an egg." The man then asked why they kept listening. "Because I keep them too busy to do anything else . . . Ironing veils, cooking goodies for me, fluffing my cushions. And, I tell them things they like to hear." So the Young Man went away, sadder but wiser.

Moral: Some Ladies listen and listen and like it. You, too, can talk the Language of the Pasha with Radio. You can reach most of the Ladies with Radio and you can talk to many of them just minutes before they actually do their shopping in grocery or drug stores—just minutes before, not the night before!

**THE SUCCESS OF ITS USERS SPEAKS CLEARLY FOR SPOT
NATIONAL SPOT RADIO**

Radio Division

EDWARD PETRY & CO., INC.

The Original Station Representative

NEW YORK · CHICAGO · ATLANTA · BOSTON · DETROIT · LOS ANGELES · SAN FRANCISCO · ST. LOUIS

Advertisement in *Television Magazine*, 1957, Courtesy Library of American Broadcasting.

housewives aren't dial-twirlers when it comes to radio, unlike when watching TV . . . they develop a primary fidelity to one station, and usually a secondary attachment to another, and stick with these stations through thick and thin voices. Radio itself has become a companion medium that stays with the housewife as she performs her daily chores . . . she has come to accept her favorite radio personalities as old friends to be relied upon and visited with again and again. Intense loyalties to specific stations develop which usually transcend program choices—it is the dial position that becomes grounded with strong emotional overtones.¹⁹

This dedicated and dim-witted radio audience was also depicted in trade discourse as a very traditional woman. A 1955 CBS sales brochure called “The Current Value of Daytime Radio” illustrated the industry’s understanding of the female radio audience—a woman in a dress and pearls, long hair swept into a bun, cooking a turkey dinner on an old-fashioned stove as she listens to her radio.²⁰ The pamphlet excerpted above, “The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife,” represented the radio housewife as a desexualized, portly older woman happily performing her household chores (in stark contrast to the languorous sex kitten/secretary depicted in the same ad).²¹ To ad and network personnel eager to woo sponsors back to daytime radio, these animated women were a selling advantage. The daytime radio audience was nonthreatening to sponsors, a known quantity with documented habits and behavior, addicted to the medium, and vulnerable to advertising. It was this conception of the radio audience advocated in trade magazines in the early to mid-1950s that kept daytime radio alive long after experts had predicted its demise.

In contrast, the daytime television audience was much discussed but rarely seen in the trade press. Over and over in industry discourse, ad men worried about the behavior and inclinations of the potential female television audience. Without sufficient scientific research to quantify the effect of television on daytime habits, all advertisers could rely on was their knowledge (or lack thereof) of the behavior of women. Revealing the inadequacy of contemporary market research and the insecurities of advertising agencies responsible for surveying the postwar female audience, one ad man stated, “I have a good deal of belief, and some indication, that women will use daytime TV as they did radio. But for the final answer, we'll need 1984 and Big Brother watching all of us to know exactly what the housewives are doing” (Pinkerton 45). What advertisers did claim to know was that the potential daytime viewer was not necessarily the same woman addicted to radio serials. This impression was reinforced by experts and government officials; for example, the psychologist Dr. Ernest Dichter reported that in the postwar period

advertising in its most modern form [had] ceased to be a magic form of mass influence. The average American has become conscious that

there is a person behind the ad who attempts to reach and influence him. No longer will the reader (or listener) be a naïve subject of mass suggestion. (Lapica 82)

Sponsor also reminded advertising agencies and sponsors that the postwar female audience would be a harder audience to sell. In a 1952 article, it reported on a US Department of Commerce study showing that female participation in World War II had made some women more resistant to commercial messages. In the wartime workforce, women had gained more economic freedom and greater educational opportunities. *Sponsor* declared that “perceptive sponsors and advertising agencies throughout the country are rapidly coming to the conclusion that the main weakness of the so-called ‘weaker sex’ is women’s disinclination to respond saleswise to certain types of radio and TV advertising” (“How to Make” 39). Women, as the Department of Commerce warned, controlled “the pursestrings of our modern economy” (39). To grease the wheels of the consumption-driven postwar economy, the government reminded advertisers of “the importance of bolstering women’s advertising response” (39).

Ad agencies’ postwar pursuit of daytime television was problematic in the context of the public relations crisis and the economic imperatives of early television. The advertising industry’s support for daytime radio and for a gendered divide—daytime radio for women and prime-time television for men—complicated experimentation in daytime television. Instead of converting radio housewives to television viewers, an audience that had been the focus of much critical and FCC attention, advertising agencies and networks by the mid-1950s had identified a separate audience—middle- to upper-class, educated, young postwar homemakers—to address through television. In the face of this audience’s growing economic power and sales resistance, ad agencies were confronted with a young postwar woman who had to be enticed by sponsors and lured into turning her television set on during the day. The ad man’s challenge to seduce the modern housewife was expressed in a 1956 Westinghouse Broadcasting ad; featuring a young and beautiful homemaker clad in a dress lounging in her suburban home in front of the television, the ad asked advertisers a provocative question: “Who Entertains Mama When Papa’s Gone to Work?” (Westinghouse 80–81)? The question remained, were ad execs man enough to get the job done?

Thus the dilemma faced by ad execs was “how do you get more women to put chores aside and watch TV without spending more for programs than daytime audience potential justifies?” (Pinkerton 23). As of 1955 admen, sponsors, and broadcasters, battling to gain respectability for the new medium as well as commercial profits, had found few answers to this question. *Sponsor* reported that the industry had yet to find a program formula to attract new, nonviewing women to consume television throughout the day (Pinkerton 23). Few formats, they claimed, could attract the attention of this more discriminating consumer (as day-

time serials had drawn radio listeners), invite commercial interest, and enrapture critics of daytime programming. A 1955 study released by Ohio State University confirmed their worst fears; housewives seemed immune to the visual impact of television and instead treated their television as a radio, listening to it as they did their housework.²² With advertisers unable to draw young women to the set, much less determine how they would use this technology, these sexy, modern postwar women were depicted in trade discourse as just beyond the adman's control.

Indeed, reminders to agencies in trade magazines—"if you understand a woman, you can get her to say 'yes' more easily"—reinforced the insecurities of postwar admen struggling to manage this industrial transition ("How to Make" 72). Articles in industry journals entitled "Admen Don't Know Their Women" and "How to Make a Woman Say 'Yes'" challenged the virility of advertising executives and sexualized their professional inadequacies ("Admen" 34+; "How to Make" 39+). As revealed in postwar trade discourse, the agencies' early attempts to entice the young postwar housewife only proved "once again how little most men know about women."²³

Certainly industrial factors such as relatively costly daytime television rates and competition for daytime audiences stalled sponsor investment in daytime television and prolonged the life of daytime radio. However, I suggest that "advertiser resistance to daytime television" may have been influenced by these discursive constructions of radio, of television, and of different female audiences ("Daytime TV" 88). When sponsors fell prey to the lures of a new mistress, prime-time television, the advertising industry's attempt to distinguish these media and their audiences was complicated. Advertising agencies championed radio to their sponsors, depicting radio as a dutiful wife who would never fail to serve sponsors' needs. This representation allowed agencies to create a commercial realm in daytime radio to serve sponsors and to shield early television from the taint of commercialism. It was these discourses that ensured the continuation of daytime radio serials long after prestigious prime-time programs had abandoned radio for television. It was these discourses that left daytime experimentation to local stations until the 1950s and postponed the development of network daytime programming. This radio/television split established by the advertising industry also delayed the emergence of the television soap opera. Fearing the raw commercialism of the form, networks, sponsors, and agencies avoided criticism by shunning the most popular and profitable form of daytime programming and the loyal audience that followed those programs. Indeed, it was not until the mid-1950s that the prime-time/daytime hierarchy institutionalized in radio was established in television; serials were successfully developed for daytime television and eliminated from prime-time schedules (as evidenced by ABC's ban on serial narratives in the prime-time *Warner Bros. Presents*) (Anderson 209).

Thus the pamphlet I cited at the beginning of this essay, "The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife," exposes the industry's investment in surveying the

postwar female consumer. The ability to attract American housewives and to contain their commercial power determined the life or death of a mass medium. Admen needed to seduce the postwar female consumer in order to do business. To ensure television's survival, the advertising industry needed to harness women's "radioactivity," their economic power, and to keep that power under their control. In the midst of this industrial transition and their conflicted role as agents of commercialism and halfhearted public servants, these industrial anxieties determined the fate of postwar broadcasting industries. It is no wonder, then, that admen and sponsors in this period feared the impotence of their sales messages and worried about their own ability to perform.

Notes

1. McCann-Erickson, Inc., "The Case of the Radioactive Housewife," [n.d.], Pamphlet 783, Library of American Broadcasting, University of Maryland Libraries (hereafter LAB) Although this pamphlet is undated, *Sponsor* references this pamphlet in "An Important New Profile" (10 Oct. 1959).
2. Susan Douglas's recent offering on the archaeology of radio listening, *Listening In*, is one of the texts that addresses the development of future programming formats and its interactions with radio audiences. Other notable studies on radio in this period are Fornatale and Mills; Barfield.
3. The end of serial programming on radio and the beginning of television soaps is discussed briefly in Edmondson and Rounds, Stedman, and MacDonald.
4. See Peterson, "Slow Expansion," and "R.M.A. on Television" for further discussion of the cooperation envisioned between the media in the late 1930s.
5. *The J. Walter Thompson Company News*, 12 Sept. 1949, Box 5, File 7, J. Walter Thompson Archives John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History, Duke University (hereafter JWT) 1.
6. Memo to staff, 28 Apr. 1944, Carroll Carroll Papers, JWT, Box 1, File 11, 1.
7. *The J. Walter Thompson Company News*, 3 Oct. 1949, JWT, Box 5, File 7, 2.
8. *Ibid.*, 13 June 1949, Box 5, File 6, 2.
9. *The J. Walter Thompson Company News*, 25 July 1949, Box 5, File 7, 3.
10. Address by Mark Woods, "Radio's Place in the World of Tomorrow," Eastern Annual Conference, AAAA, Hotel Roosevelt, New York, 31 Oct. 1950, Hedges Collection, LAB, 22, Box 4, File 7, 9.
11. "What the J. Walter Thompson Company Stands For," Feb. 1953, Dan Seymour Collection, JWT, Box 1, File 3, 2-4.
12. For examples of articles trumpeting radio's viability in *Sponsor*, see "Radio Is Getting Better"; "Three Proofs"; 17 July 1950; "Radio Is Getting Bigger"; "They're Coming"; "Is the Sponsor."
13. CBS, "The Current Values of Daytime Radio," Oct. 1955, Pamphlet 315, LAB.
14. *Ibid.*
15. AM Radio Sales Company, "What Did You Do Today? A Day in the Life of America's Most Important Customer—The Housewife and Mother," 20 Jan. 1964, Pamphlet 3141, LAB.
16. Address by Mark Woods, 6.
17. Memo to Dan Danker et al., 28 Apr. 1944, Carroll Carroll papers, JWT, Box 1, File 11.
18. A variety of studies acknowledged that daytime serial listening cut across socioeconomic, age, and educational lines. The most noted study to publish these results was Paul Lazarfeld's *The People Look at Radio* (1946).
19. McCann-Erickson, "The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife."

20. CBS, "The Current Values of Daytime Radio."
21. McCann-Erickson, "The Case of the Radio-Active Housewife."
22. "Captive or Casual? . . . Housewives Like Their Video, but Leave It Too, Columbus Study Shows," *Advertising Age* 9 May 1955, Dan Seymour Collection, JWT, Box 2, File 11.
23. AM Radio Sales Company, "What Did You Do Today?"

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CHAPTER 17**RADIO REDEFINES ITSELF, 1947–1962**

Eric Rothenbuhler and Tom McCourt

AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II the radio industry in the United States was sure-footedly following a path it had blazed nearly two decades earlier. Network programming originating from New York City dominated local station schedules; this programming, financed by national advertisers, featured dramas, quiz shows, adventure series, and comedies, interspersed with news and informational programs. Music (almost exclusively live, rather than recorded) was secondary, largely a means of filling time during evenings, on weekends, and between programs. The industry's cultural and aesthetic standards were nationalist and middlebrow, reflected in the genteel reserve of its announcers. The radio business appeared to be stable and successful.

Within a decade nearly everything about the industry had changed. The number of radio stations tripled. The transistor increased radio's portability. Most significantly, families no longer gathered around the radio in the evening for variety programs and dramas; instead, they were drawn to the enervated glow of the television screen. The leviathans of CBS, NBC, and ABC were feeding little more than spot news and a sprinkling of feature programs to their radio affiliates, whose ranks had declined precipitously. Radio station managers, scrambling to fill schedules and retain shrinking audiences, turned to local programming, on-air talent, advertising, and recorded music. The results were often crassly commercial, yet included an astonishing array of accents, expressions, and attitudes. The radio business was filled with uncertainty and unpredictability.

This era of experimentation was brief. During the late 1950s, industrial responses to technological, industrial, and social developments were codified into what became known as Top 40 radio programming. Although radio stations competed against each other for overall ratings, broadcasting began to evolve into narrowcasting as stations developed “brands” through music selection in order to define audiences and reduce uncertainty for advertisers. Though they seemed to present listeners with greater choice, these formats were highly standardized by chain owners seeking to replicate the same processes at all of their stations. By the early 1960s, tightly regulated formats and rigid playlists dominated radio.

Radio’s history to date in the United States, then, can be roughly divided into the network era and the format era, each characterized by its own forms of organization and programming. We focus on the period of transition between these eras. Transitional periods, which feature competitive approaches to media organization and practices, and whose social and cultural consequences are varied and unpredictable, may more clearly test the lessons of history than the stable periods they precede or follow. We illustrate national trends with a detailed examination of the radio industry in Austin, Texas. Though most cities could have served the purpose, Austin proved a useful choice for several reasons. Like many others, it is a medium-sized city removed from either coast. It has a distinct local class structure, a sizeable minority population (one of the pioneer African-American deejays, Lavada Durst, broadcast on Austin’s KVET), and an extensive and diverse musical history. All of these factors are relevant to developments in radio ownership and programming in the 1950s. In addition to its uniquely hybrid musical culture, Austin illustrates the confluence of social developments, economic possibilities, and political considerations that we believe typify the era.

The years between 1947 and 1962 were a remarkable time in the history of radio—and of the United States. By providing new venues for expression of regional, class, and ethnic identities, radio played an instrumental role in a series of major transformations, if not revolutions, in American culture. Yet how did an industry seemingly in decline help spearhead so many social and cultural changes? The loss of radio’s status as the dominant broadcast medium was, in fact, key to this process. As radio sought to redefine itself, traditional business models were discarded in favor of new opportunities for entrepreneurial innovation and cultural expression. The veneer of network paternalism was stripped off to reveal the often rude and untutored, yet irresistibly vital, mosaic of American popular culture. Since then, nothing has been the same.

Music and News

The radio industry is a system for assembling audiences. Radio allows massive numbers of anonymous and geographically dispersed people to be aggregated into an audience and potentially converted into a market. While theatrical and

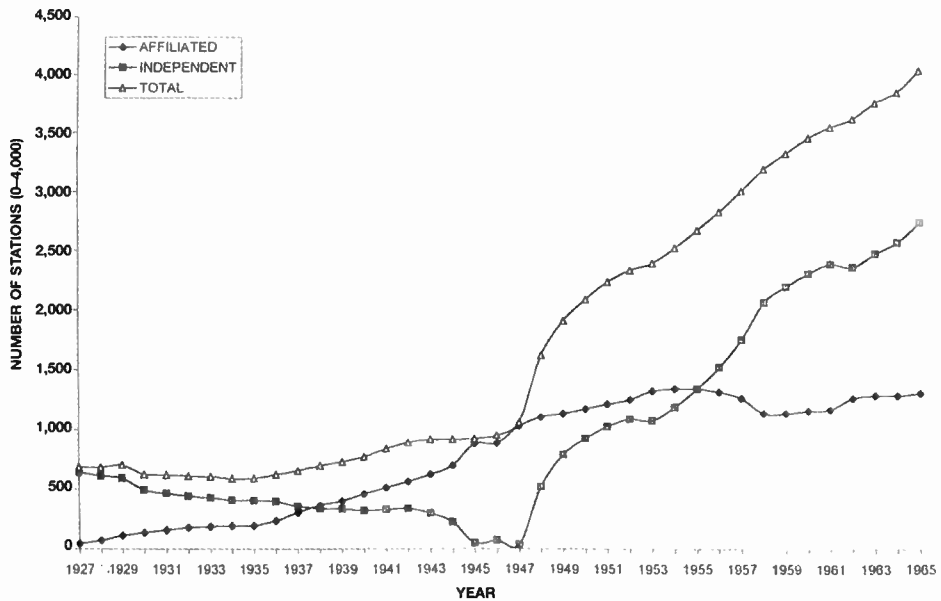
musical tours, film releases, and national magazines pioneered the idea of dispersed, national audiences and markets, network radio perfected it through the ability to gather listeners into a simultaneously “present” audience. Early indicators of radio’s cultural power abound. For example, the fact that songs became popular more quickly than ever before attested to the medium’s ability to accelerate and diffuse cultural innovation (MacDougald). The commercial radio system also melded advertisements, music, drama, and news together into a flow of programming unprecedented in scope.

The commercial network broadcasting system was in place by the late 1920s; the National Broadcasting Company went on the air in 1926, and the Columbia Broadcasting System did so in 1927. These networks created economic efficiencies through low distribution costs and uniform scheduling, and also generated new forms of advertising and revenue streams. The resulting flow of money swept up nearly everything in its path, so the majority of stations became commercial operations within a few years and network affiliates soon thereafter. Dimmick reports that only 7% of radio stations in the United States were commercial operations in 1925. This number rose to 11% in 1926 and 59% in 1930, representing a thousandfold increase (from 21 to 223). Figure 17.1 displays the history of network affiliation. The network system’s hegemony was cemented by the 1934 Communications Act (see McChesney), which forced most noncommercial and many independent stations to share frequencies or move to less desirable locations on the radio band. However, a number of independent stations around the country survived the network onslaught, including WNEW and WINS in New York City, KLAC in Los Angeles, WITH in Baltimore, and WSB in Atlanta.¹ These independent stations pioneered the use of recorded music on the air, developed “disc jockey” air personalities, and inaugurated what became known as music-and-news programming (see MacFarland, “Up,” *Development*).

Broadcasts of live music performances had been a mainstay of radio programming since the early 1920s. Many stations employed in-house groups and orchestras, and record companies frequently stamped the phrase “not licensed for radio broadcast” on records for fear that airplay would cut into sales of records, sheet music, and promoter’s concert fees. Hilmes (1987) notes that the early rulings distinguishing radio amateurs from broadcasters provided a regulatory basis for emphasizing live music. The networks and their affiliates, subject to pressures from performance rights societies and the musicians’ union, entered into a 1938 agreement with the American Federation of Musicians that banned broadcasts of recordings. Independent stations did not participate in the agreement.² Although recorded music lacked the prestige of live music emanating from New York City, it provided them with an inexpensive and flexible alternative. The earliest experimental broadcasts had featured records, and many precedents for the modern deejay can be identified.

Re
live
vs.
recorded
music

Figure 17.1 • Number of Radio Stations: Network Affiliated, Independent, and Total



Source: Sterling, *Electronic Media 12*, table 171-A.

Jack Cooper's *The All-Negro Hour* on Chicago's WSBC switched from live music and guests to a deejay-and-records format in 1932. The same year, Al Jarvis's *The World's Largest Make-Believe Ballroom* began broadcasting on KFNB in Los Angeles. Martin Block, a newsman at KFNB at the time, moved to New York in 1935 and began a similar program at WNEW (Barlow, *Voice Over 55*, 157-58, 308; Fornatale and Mills 12).

Although the networks targeted specific groups (such as housewives or children) during the day, most of their programming was designed to attract broad audiences. Their evening schedules, when listenership was highest, were filled with general-interest programs and series. In contrast, independent stations targeted specific groups throughout their schedules by programming in "blocks": certain types of music, interspersed with news reports, would air at given times to attract certain groups of listeners. Block programming was characterized by Cooper's *All-Negro Hour* and Dewey Phillips's *Red Hot and Blue* rhythm-and-blues show on WHBQ in Memphis in the 1950s. From the mid-1930s to the late 1950s one of the most successful independent stations, New York City's WNEW, featured a different style of music and presentation with each disc jockey. Although sponsors of block music programs occasionally selected the music for their shows, most decisions on airplay were left to individual deejays. These stations

surveyed record stores for their most popular songs, and local interest, rather than national popularity, determined airplay (*Billboard's* "Top 100" national sales chart was not implemented until 1955).

Changes in regulation promoted the growth of independent stations. In 1947 the FCC adopted new policies on radio station interference that vastly increased the availability of station licenses, particularly for low-powered, day-time-only facilities. Fewer than 1,000 radio stations were broadcasting in the United States in 1945; but 2,000 were broadcasting in 1950, 3,500 in 1960, and 4,000 in 1965 (see Figure 1). This explosive growth created opportunities for new entrepreneurs and interests to enter the system but also increased competition for audiences and revenues, driving down advertising prices and cutting into profits at many stations.

Post WWII
or
inlets,

To ease these pressures and reduce costs, many stations turned to recorded music, local on-air talent, and local sponsors. The desire of station managers to find someone to fill airtime and someone to pay for it led to a new diversity of voices, musical styles, attitudes, and expressions. In a 1947 report titled *An Economic Study of Standard Broadcasting*, the FCC claimed that "a small segment of the listening audience carefully selected as a minority group, may, if it is loyally attached to the station, give it a unique fascination for advertisers" (qtd. in Fornatale and Mills 15). By using music selection to establish consistent "core" audiences, station owners turned their shrinking listenership into an advertising advantage.

The Development of Radio in Austin, Texas

Four radio stations were broadcasting in the Austin area by 1950: KTBC at 590 AM, with a daytime power rating of 5,000 watts and 1,000 watts at night; KVET, a 1,000 watt station at 1300 AM; KTXN, a 1,000-watt station at 1370 AM; and KNOW, a 250-watt station at 1490 AM.³ KNOW had its roots in Austin's first broadcast operation, a pre-World War I amateur station at the University of Texas. In 1925 the station was assigned the call letters KUT, and it aired lectures and discussions from 8:00 to 10:00 three nights a week, plus a Sunday morning church service. In 1927 the university sold the license to two Houston businessmen, who established KUT as Austin's first commercial radio station. Ownership changed to Houston's Rice Hotel in 1930, which sold the station two years later to Hearst Publications. Hearst changed the call letters to KNOW, shifted the station's frequency from 1300 to 1490 MHz, and raised the station's power from 100 to 250 watts, which significantly increased its coverage area. In 1939 Hearst sold the station to another chain operation, Frontier Broadcasting, which focused on regional news coverage.

KTBC began broadcasting on 22 July 1939 as a daytime-only station at 1150 AM with a power rating of 250 watts. In 1943 the station was purchased by

Lyndon Johnson under his wife's name. That same year KTBC became a CBS radio affiliate. Citing alleged interference with San Antonio's clear-channel WOAI at 1200 and a Texas A&M station at 1150, KTBC, backed with Johnson's political clout, sought and obtained a reallocation from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to an uncluttered area at 590 AM, and in the late 1940s it increased its power to 5,000 watts, making it the most powerful station in the Austin area by far, with a daytime coverage area that blanketed thirty-eight counties, extending from Dallas to Corpus Christi.⁴

Lyndon and Ladybird Johnson were by far the most powerful figures in Austin broadcasting by the mid-'40s. The relative scarcity of broadcast licenses ensured that radio stations were lucrative, particularly if they enjoyed the national advertising that accompanied network affiliation, and the Johnsons encouraged their friends to explore broadcasting. In 1946 KVET was founded by a group of Johnson's political cronies.⁵ By 1952 the other founders had sold their interests to Willard Deason, who became the sole owner. The station was affiliated with the Mutual Broadcasting Network, but although much of its schedule was devoted to Mutual programming in the late forties, the station avoided direct competition with KNOW's regional news coverage and KTBC's network programming by devoting its evening broadcasts primarily to music.

KTXN was established in 1947 as a daytime-only station but foundered because of its inability to compete with KNOW, KTBC, and KVET in consistent audience reach. Local businessman Frank Stewart purchased the station in 1949 and changed KTXN's programming to appeal specifically to Hispanic and black audiences. According to a KTXN marketing memo, "Primary market research in the fall of 1949 just prior to purchase negotiations indicated a great need for a Mexican-Negro advertising medium. In the primary coverage area the combined groups comprise 34.8 percent of the total population." Like many other independent station owners whose lack of network affiliation precluded them from drawing on a ready-made pool of programming, Stewart was undoubtedly aware of significant demographic changes in American society. Though focused on the bottom line, station owners such as Stewart unwittingly reshaped the cultural landscape of the United States.

Broadcasting and Minorities

World War II drastically altered the shape of the workforce and helped minority groups assimilate (at least economically) into the mainstream of American society. While the average income of blacks continued to lag far behind that of whites, studies indicate that it grew at a faster rate between 1940 and 1954 than at any previous time in American history (Killingsworth 204). These changes naturally drew the attention of advertisers and radio programmers. WDIA in Memphis was the first station to program exclusively to blacks, beginning in

1947, and was soon followed by Chicago's WVON and a host of others. Also that year, San Antonio's KCOR became the first station to target an exclusively Hispanic audience. Philip Ennis found that "[b]y 1955, more than six hundred stations were programming to their black communities large and small in thirty nine states, with thirty six stations devoting their entire schedules to black-oriented material" (175–76).

However, minority radio in the United States has a tangled and conflicted history, and evaluating its legacy is no simple matter. While the postwar radio industry afforded new opportunities for minority cultural expression and economic advancement, it also provided opportunities for exploitation (see Barlow, "Commercial," *Voice Over*). Very few of the stations targeting minorities actually were owned by nonwhites. The history of minority radio is punctuated with stories of advertisers who, wishing to congratulate the deejay-salesman responsible for winning them so many new customers, abruptly refused to shake hands when this person was revealed to be black. In other instances, blacks were hired as freelance voice coaches and programming consultants, yet the permanent staff remained white-only (Barlow, *Voice Over*).⁶ Minority station personnel undoubtedly were worse paid than their white counterparts. Broadcasters' definition of minority communities as markets and listeners as customers was inherently exploitive—yet everyone's money was the same color. At least in this regard, Hispanics, blacks, and others were the equal of whites.⁷

On the other hand, radio stations and programs targeting minorities were a source of tremendous pride to the communities they served. For the first time, stations were programmed by minorities for minorities; for the first time, recognizably black and Hispanic voices were heard on the air consistently.⁸ As Barlow observes, though black-voice radio quickly evolved into a standard set of stereotypes and caricatures—all the better to be recognized as black-voice, to perform the cultural role of the black male (and occasional female) in the white imagination—it nevertheless represented a breakthrough (*Voice Over*). WDIA's Nat Williams, KVET's Lavada Durst, and others laid the groundwork for early rock-and-roll deejays such as Dewey Phillips, Alan Freed, and Wolfman Jack, and minority-appeal radio unquestionably increased the nation's cultural diversity. It also provided limited opportunities for blacks and Hispanics to enter the radio industry in business and professional roles.

One of the key cultural contributions of "Negro-appeal" radio was the dissemination of rhythm and blues. Rhythm and blues had often been dismissed as mere jukebox and barroom music; radio airplay legitimated it as a genre, a counterpart to pop and country-and-western music in the minds of many (the latter had its own complex history; see Peterson).⁹ Airplay also helped rhythm and blues to cross over to white audiences—the blues recording boom of the 1920s had depended in part on drawing a white audience, but that crossover was small and slow in comparison to the breakout of rhythm and blues on the radio

in the 1950s. In doing so, radio played a crucial role in the creation of the teenage audience. Despite the cultural chasm of Jim Crow, as well as the primary popularity of uptempo R&B instrumentals based on their “danceability,” many white teenagers both here and abroad grasped the veiled yet complex codes of self-discovery and liberation that often threaded their way through rhythm and blues, codes that became overt with the development of rock and roll.

Rhythm-and-Blues Radio in Austin

While KTXN turned its attention to minority listeners in the late '40s, black-oriented radio programs had existed in Austin for several years. In the early forties Elmer Akins began airing a fifteen-minute Sunday morning gospel program on KNOW; he moved his program to KVET in 1947 (Ellinger 6). That year Lavada Durst began broadcasting *The Rosewood Ramble*, the first rhythm-and-blues program in Texas, on KVET. Durst was born in Austin in 1913 and first drew attention as announcer for the Austin Black Senators, a semipro baseball team in the Negro League (Frink A1). He (also worked as a barrelhouse pianist playing fish fries and rent parties, and recorded for regional rhythm-and-blues labels such as Peacock and Uptown in the late forties. Durst was hired by KVET's then-manager John Connally and adopted the air name of “Dr. Hepcat.” According to Durst, “They [station management] said they wanted me to put on a program and beam it directly to the black people.” He recalled his first contact with the station: “They called and asked if I was a nigger. But I hung in there” (Ellsworth; Szilagyi).

Although neither the first nor the only black broadcaster in Austin (in addition to Akins's gospel program, Tony Van Walls deejayed *Blues before Breakfast* mornings on KTXN), Durst's rhythm-and-blues program attracted widespread attention in the black community and had significant crossover appeal to whites, although it was relegated to the graveyard slot, from 10:30 to midnight. The popularity of Durst's program attracted regional and national sponsors, including Grand Prize Beer, RC Hair Pomade, and Thunderbird Wine. One writer recalled that

[h]is signature style of delivery included rhymed and stylized slang to open and close the show and to introduce each new record. A standard lead-in might go something like this: ‘Hey there chappie, ’lo chicks! You have latched onto the Rosewood Ramble. It’s a real gone deal that I’m gonna wheel, so stand by why I pad your skull. I’m not stuffin, I’m sure enuffin’.’¹⁰

As with most deejay programs of the time, Durst enjoyed virtually complete autonomy in music selection. He told an interviewer that station management “didn’t tell me anything, they just said, ‘Here it is, get it.’ And I got it [Ellsworth, 1978].” Durst abandoned his radio show when he turned to the ministry in the late fifties.

Throughout the fifties KVET was very much a music-and-news operation. Although local deejays provided much of its programming, KVET could also draw from programming provided by the Mutual Broadcasting System. KTXN, however, was a marginal daytime-only operation and struggled to establish its identity, ultimately focusing on Austin's Hispanic population. A KTXN marketing memo is illuminating in ways unintended by its author:

Negro and Latin Americans always live on a "side of town." They are either restricted or restrict themselves to certain retail trade outlets. The product advertiser using KTXN is furnished a list of the stores that enjoy the bulk of the Negro-Spanish speaking trade. Then at low cost, with minimum effort, the vendor is able to secure saturation distribution in the area covered by his advertising. . . . When it is realized that the Negro and Spanish speaking [populations] of Central Texas so enjoy KTXN's direct and exclusive approach to their special interests that they have voluntarily made of themselves a captive audience, then KTXN's low cost-per-listener-reached becomes apparent.¹¹

While Durst's program (and an early-evening Hispanic program) on KVET attracted national advertisers, KTXN focused on the local market because of limits on the station's reach and schedule. The two stations were complementary, rather than competitive, since KTXN signed off at sunset. KTXN's black programming was relegated to the time slot from 6:30 until 8:30 A.M.: *Blues before Breakfast* was followed by a fifteen-minute program titled *Magic Bandstand* and 30 minutes of gospel music. KTXN's owner described the station's programming:

The entire broadcast day is blocked programmed: Mexican music, news, soap operas, women's commentaries with Spanish-speaking announcers and featured artists capture the Latin American. The remaining shows feature Negro disc jockeys with race records, spirituals and news of special interest to these two markets.¹²

This schedule, and others like it, indicates the attempts of radio programmers to capture audiences whose cultural needs and interests were unmet by another, relatively new, medium that increasingly dominated American broadcasting: television.

The Impact of Television

Television was publicly unveiled at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. Although radio advertising revenues reached an all-time high immediately following World War II, television's long-term financial prospects were greeted enthusiastically within the broadcasting industry. Six commercial television stations were on the air in 1946, and many radio network affiliates (such as Austin's

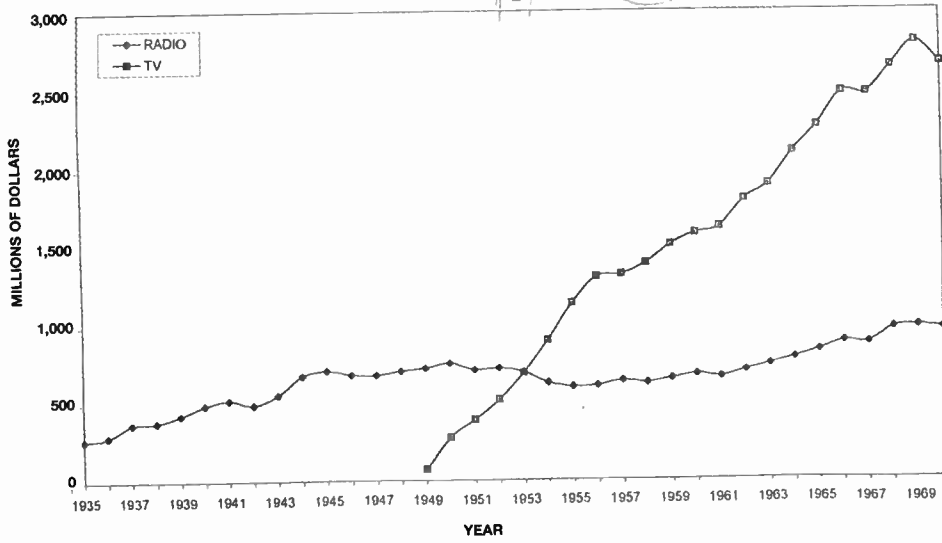
KTBC) began applying for television licenses. RCA in particular urged its affiliates to get licenses (Barnouw 242). Each TV station required significant capital investment; in many cases, broadcasters diverted this money from their successful radio operations. The networks also subsidized their early television efforts with radio profits. In June 1946, NBC's research department predicted that television broadcasting would lose \$8 million for the network over the next four years. The department recommended that NBC take a \$3.5 million federal tax writeoff by subsidizing television development costs out of radio profits (Fornatale and Mills 3; Barnouw 244).

In 1949 television's advertising income amounted to \$57 million; over the next decade its growth soared by a factor of twenty-eight (see Figure 17.2). This exponential increase was matched by skyrocketing viewership levels: the number of households with television receivers rose from 172,000 in 1948 to over 20 million in 1953 and nearly 42 million in 1958 (Sterling table 680-A). At the behest of sponsors and advertising agencies, many network radio programs jumped directly to television, and a massive exodus of producers and talent to television continued throughout the early fifties. The networks raided each other's personnel, offering more-lucrative and more-convenient contracts to their competitors' radio stars. All of these developments had a withering effect on network radio operations.

Television clearly eclipsed radio as the dominant broadcast medium for advertising, audiences, and investments. Throughout the early 1950s the networks virtually abandoned their radio operations to focus on television, and radio network programming became less valuable to local radio stations.¹³ The total number of hours of network programming per week declined, and by 1955-56 the average rating for network shows had slipped to only 2.3. The amount of churn on network schedules and the proliferation of network music programming underscored the industry's instability at the national level. While the radio networks' growing emphasis on music programming was intended to counter television's appropriation of traditional radio programming, this strategy reduced the uniqueness of network programming to affiliate stations.

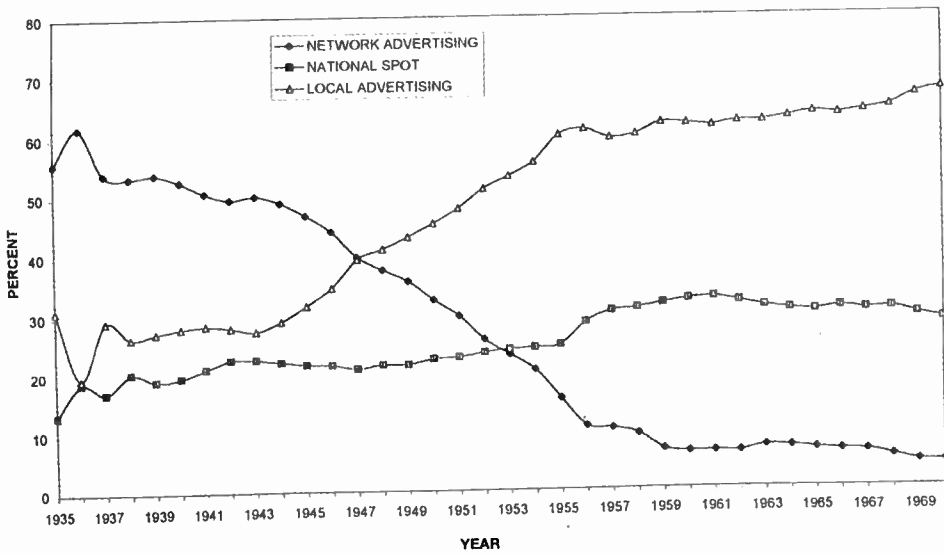
In addition to a lack of network interest, affiliates were hampered by competition from the proliferation of independent radio stations licensed after the war. More stations were dividing up audiences and advertising as television ate into overall listenership and revenues. Fornatale and Mills (7) report that total radio advertising revenues rose from \$374 million in 1947 to \$464 million in 1953, but in that same period average station revenues dropped from \$246,000 to \$194,000.¹⁴ Figure 2 shows how advertising expenditures for radio remained relatively constant across the 1950s, even as both the number of stations sharing that income and the advertising expenditures on television grew rapidly. All of the radio networks suffered revenue declines and cut their advertising rates and compensation levels repeatedly throughout the early 1950s. As a result, a num-

Figure 17.2 • Total Advertising Income for Television and Radio in Constant Dollars (1958=100)



Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States.

Figure 17.3 • Proportion of Radio Advertising Income for Local, National Spot, and Network



Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States.

ber of stations defected from the networks, and individual stations began drawing from several networks. Stations also developed news-oriented regional networks, such as the Texas State Network used by Austin's KNOW. These regional networks were aided by technological advancements; wire recorders, and later tape recorders, offered an immediacy and localism that national network programming was unable to match.

The shift of network advertising money from radio to television, coupled with the explosion in the number of radio stations, led to a radical restructuring of radio industry financing. The system historically had relied on income from network advertising; after 1947 it relied primarily on local advertising (see Figure 17.3). At the station level this shift had many implications for business and culture. It transformed the work culture within stations by raising the status of salespeople and on-air personnel who enjoyed extensive local networks. It allowed stations to serve as a locus for commerce, a place where such diverse characters as radio station owners, salespeople, deejays, local store owners, musicians, nightclub owners, promoters, and record company personnel could meet and make deals. In addition, it increased the frequency of on-air references to local places, names, and events, and it provided an outlet for local music. Local advertising thus tied the radio station to its service area both directly, through financing and business activities, and indirectly, by linking communication and culture.

Changes in the Audience

Between 1947 and 1962 the radio industry also reconceptualized the composition and behavior of its audience. Car radios had been available since 1930; by 1953 nearly 60% of all automobiles were equipped with radios (Sterling table 670-A). That same year, the first transistor radio was marketed in the United States. Smaller, inexpensive vacuum tube receivers had been marketed before the war, but the impact of the transistor was immediate and profound. Between 1950 and 1960 the total number of receivers in use rose from 85 million to over 156 million (Sterling table 660-C).¹⁵ By the early 1950s the average home had more than two radios; by the early 1960s, more than three. This increase allowed the family audience to disaggregate into individuals with distinct tastes and listening habits. At the same time, overall listenership was in decline. People listened to the radio an average of four hours per day in the 1940s; by 1955 this had dropped to two hours per day (Sterling, table 661-A). In addition, television siphoned off radio listeners during the prime-time evening hours.

The radio industry responded to these changes in three ways. First, it reconstructed the broadcast day. Stations reconsidered the placement of their most popular programs and reconfigured their rate cards and sales pitches. Morning and afternoon "drive times" became the most valuable commercial periods as

car radios proliferated and commuting distances increased. Second, stations adjusted to the fact that daytime listening was often a secondary activity. To Bernice Judis, manager of New York's WNEW, successful programming was programming in which "[y]ou can leave the room and, when you come back, you've missed nothing" (qtd. in MacFarland, *Development*). Such ambient listening patterns contributed to the shift to music programming (although soap operas had always served a similar function on network schedules). Third, to attract evening listeners, programmers realized they needed to reach groups whose cultural tastes were not being served by television. Hence, most of the early minority programs (and, later, rock-and-roll shows) on radio were aired in the evening.¹⁶

X
Implication
for rock &
roll

As the number of radios increased and listeners became more mobile, the overall radio audience fragmented across time and space. Listeners became more isolated from each other; they could be found in a larger number and variety of situations, which yielded yet more variance in listening preferences and behaviors. These changes rendered the overall audience less predictable and made it profitable not to think of the audience as an aggregate. Radio programmers who could isolate smaller, less heterogeneous audience segments or listening contexts would reduce the uncertainty of their programming decisions and attract advertisers seeking specific groups of consumers. Radio now produced (and reflected) a fragmented and pluralistic culture:

The teenager market also was "discovered" in the 1950s. This market developed from rising prosperity, higher levels of education, and greater discretionary time and income for adolescents. (A 1949 NBC report, "Urban Teen-agers As Radio Listeners and Customers," uncovered a "buying power of six billion dollars . . . 64% of boys and girls as having radios of their own") (qtd. in MacFarland, "Up from Middle America" 20). As radio audiences shrank and subdivided and as competition increased, this market presented a unique opportunity for programmers and advertisers. It also led to a host of cultural effects. While the importance of teenage audiences should not be overestimated (most teenagers were in school six hours per day), they bought greater numbers of records than adults. Since record sales determined airplay, teenagers disproportionately determined what type of music stations would air.

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Re teenage
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FM and the Fine Arts

FM radio had been thoroughly marginalized since the 1940s, although it is relatively immune from electrical interference and offers greater fidelity for music broadcasts than AM. In 1939 the FCC authorized FM broadcasting at 42-50 MHz, but AM station owners (including newspaper chains such as Hearst) feared that FM would increase competition for advertising. In 1945 the networks and AM owners pressured the FCC to move the FM band to 88-108 MHz, which made all existing FM radios obsolete and severely retarded FM's growth until the

late fifties. FM also was hampered by its high power requirements and small coverage areas relative to AM.

Coupled with the lack of receivers in use, these shortcomings discouraged potential advertisers, and Austin's first FM service was a fine arts station subsidized by a local high-fidelity equipment dealer, who hoped that broadcasts would spur sales. James E. Moore owned Audioland, which housed both KAZZ and KHFI, the Hi-Fi Record Center (a record retailer), Hi-Fi Incorporated (a home entertainment retailer), and the Texas Two-Way Communication Company, which supplied communications hardware to business (Cochrane 6). Moore told a reporter that "since I had always been a jazz lover and collector, I soon developed a strong desire to have a good FM station with jazz and modern music. Since FM was not supporting itself anyway, but instead I was the support, why not?"¹⁷

KHFI-FM signed on the air at 98.3 FM on 23 March 1956 and was followed by KAZZ-FM at 101.7 FM a year later. KHFI focused exclusively on classical music and advertised itself as "No News—just good music." KAZZ-FM programming featured ragtime, big-band music, and modern jazz. Both stations initially broadcast from noon to midnight and were managed by Rod Kennedy, who later bought KHFI and KASE, a 1,000-watt station at 970 AM that went on the air in 1960. On 1 January 1960, KAZZ and KHFI combined facilities for the first stereo broadcast in the Austin area. The broadcast required two FM tuners and featured big-band records and excerpts from musicals from 10 A.M. to 3 P.M.¹⁸

The University of Texas also resumed its interest in broadcasting. In the late thirties the university appropriated \$20,000 for the production and distribution of radio programs. Equipment was installed in Littlefield Carriage House, and "Radio House" aired its first production on 19 November 1939, using the Texas Quality Network, the Texas State Network, and KTBC (Lucchese 8). Nevertheless, the facility had no transmitter of its own. In 1955 Robert Schenkkan was hired to head UT's communication projects, including a new home for radio and television and a university radio station. UT was reluctant to fund the station, but Schenkkan divided the financial burden between the university and civic organizations. KUT-FM went on the air at 90.7 FM on November 10, 1958. Programming included news, features, live classical music (featuring Department of Music faculty and students and the Austin Symphony), and drama, and students were involved with programming production and scheduling. By 1960 the Austin FM market was established, with two commercial FM stations sharing the same ownership, and one noncommercial university station. Little overlap in programming existed between the stations.

The Rise of Top 40

Because of these social, economic, regulatory, and technological changes, the formerly centralized decision making in the commercial radio industry was dis-

persed in the mid-1950s. This period of experimentation quickly passed, however, as once-innovative programming policies became institutionalized as “common sense” and were adopted by managers across the country. Top 40 radio was developed as a refinement of music and news by four station group owners: Todd Storz, Gordon McLendon, Gerald Bartell, and the Plough pharmaceutical company (MacFarland, “Up from Middle America”). Though they worked independently of each other, all were based in the Midwest, away from major media centers, because station acquisitions on either coast were prohibitively expensive.

Top 40 became associated with rock and roll, but its early practitioners varied their musical offerings. They largely depended on “hits” of the day (modeled on the *Your Hit Parade* program), but used other music to broaden audience appeal. Although all four of the owners listed above contributed to the development of Top 40 over the course of several years, its parentage commonly is traced to Todd Storz. Storz’s father purchased Omaha’s daytime-only KOWH in 1949, and Storz replaced block programming of classical and country music with popular music. Storz also acquired WTIK in New Orleans, WHB in Kansas City, and WGDY in Minneapolis, all of which were consolidated under the name of Mid-Continent Broadcasting.

Storz centralized programming control and tightly reined in the autonomy of deejays in an effort to create a “total station sound.” He continued to winnow down KOWH’s playlist until it reached a maximum of forty songs per week in 1955. Fornatale and Mills described the epiphany that led to Top 40:

Storz and his assistant at KOWH, Bill Stewart, were sitting and drinking in a bar across from the station. They had been there for hours and had noticed how often some songs were replayed on the jukebox. Near closing time, a waitress walked over to the jukebox, took change from her pocket, and played the same song three times in a row. Concluding from this that people liked familiarity, Storz and Stewart decided to reduce the number of songs played on the station and to repeat the biggest hits more often. Storz decided that one song each week should be designated a “pick hit”; it and the number one song were played once an hour. (27)

the idea
J Storz

One of the keys to keeping the Top 40 sound consistent was a “clock hour” formula that specified every element of programming and explicitly stated when it was to occur (i.e., hits, fast- or slow-tempo songs, news, weather, and commercials). Top 40’s strategy was to demand little concentration from the audience, since station managers found that 50% of their audience was mobile (MacFarland, “Up from Middle America” 403). The success of Top 40 also depended on attracting the burgeoning teenage audience, which was drawn to rock-and-roll programming and extravagant contests and giveaways; Bartell’s flagship station, WOKY in Milwaukee had as its motto “Let’s Make Nothing but

Money" (Fornatale and Mills). In 1958 a Storz station, WHB in Kansas City, became the first station to program rock and roll exclusively.

Centralization and Control

Storz's successful strategy was quickly appropriated by Gordon McLendon, who owned KLIF in Dallas, Houston's KILT, WRIT in Milwaukee, and WYSL in Buffalo. Despite the similarity of their programming strategies, McLendon and Storz refused to compete directly. According to Gordon McLendon, "We had an agreement that we would not go into each other's markets. It was an unspoken verbal agreement" [qtd. in Fornatale and Mills 29]. Since Austin was sandwiched between McLendon operations in Dallas and Houston, local programmers were keenly aware of Top 40's earnings potential. Austin's network affiliates remained faithful, but in early 1958 KTXN relocated its station from Sixth Street to the Lamar Plaza shopping center (becoming the first station to relocate outside of downtown Austin), and on 12 August it changed its call letters to KOKE and began featuring a Top 40 format.¹⁹ KOKE remained a Top 40 station until 1962, when KNOW switched to all-rock Top 40. Unable to compete for advertisers with KNOW, which enjoyed a twenty-four-hour operation and a larger coverage area, KOKE switched to a country-and-western Top 40 format.

The guiding ideology of Storz, McLendon, and other Top 40 programmers was articulated in an article titled "The Storz Bombshell" in the May 1957 issue of *Television* magazine. These tenets hold true for format radio more than forty years later:

Qtn. (The listener wants to hear his favorite numbers again and again. The programming of music is controlled entirely by the choice of the public. If the public suddenly showed a preference for Chinese music, we would play it. The growing universality of musical taste appears to make possible the application of a single programming standard to many individual markets. The disc jockey is not representative of the public. Because he is usually above the audience mentally and financially, his own preferences are a dangerous guide. (Qtd. in Barnes 10)

Of course, the claim that consumer preference determines programming is specious. There is no consumer demand for unheard songs; instead, public interest in new songs is created by radio airplay and other forms of media exposure. For example, the weekly "pick hit" would be played once an hour, twenty-four hours per day, for seven successive days. Storz and his imitators could even say they agreed with the critics of rock and roll but were bound by the purported democracy of commercial radio. The key advantages of formats for radio programmers are reducing decision-making uncertainty and drawing advertisers (see Rothenbuhler and McCourt; Rothenbuhler). Top 40's emphasis on audi-

ence research suited the standardization of chain operations, which ultimately led to a decline in localism and a return to national programming trends.

Music monitors were hired by some stations to check the competition's playlist. Stations conducted surveys of record sales and juke box plays until they found that dealers and distributors were "hyping" the popularity figures to manipulate sales. Increasingly, station owners sought to avoid such manipulation by depending on national charts and newsletters to decide a record's popularity. Management's determination to be in control of music selection was in many cases an effective antidote to the conditions on which "payola" depended: i.e., the disc jockey choosing his own music. (MacFarland, "Up from Middle America" 400–1)

The practice of payola (or pay-for-play) can be traced back to cash payments to vaudeville acts and orchestra leaders following the Civil War (Ennis 44–45; Segrave). Investigations into radio payola reached a peak in the late 1950s and early 1960s primarily at the urging of ASCAP, a music publishing firm. ASCAP licensed older standards, while BMI, which was founded in part by the National Association of Broadcasters and was 40% owned by the networks, licensed rhythm-and-blues and country-and-western records. As popular music diversified away from Tin Pan Alley, ASCAP found its lucrative publishing royalties declining (see Ennis; Ryan).

Station owners used the payola investigations as an excuse to wrest programming control from deejays, although this action did not necessarily arise from ethical concerns. A Storz employee recalled:

Todd used to sit and scheme for hours about how he could tap into this cash flow. It drove him crazy—and a lot of other station owners too—to know that all these payoffs were flowing right by them into the hands of deejays. He kept looking for a way to get a share, to get the record companies to channel money to the station owner. (Qtd. in Fornatale and Mills 51].

In the context of a radically transformed industry and audience, Top 40 was a hugely successful business strategy. Reports circulated of 50% audience shares, and the Storz and McLendon management and programming models were widely imitated. By 1956 Top 40 stations and "tight" playlists were common.²⁰ Networks continued to recede in importance; whenever Storz or McLendon purchased a station, they immediately dropped any national network affiliation, and presumably so did their imitators. As successful owners gobbled up more and more stations, local station autonomy was replaced by tightly prescribed playlists, jingle packages, and other standardized programming and business procedures. Although Top 40 radio stressed deejay "personality," deejays sur-

rendered all traces of decision-making authority. The final clasp had snapped shut; the circle of corporate control was complete once again.

Conclusion

Corporate interests are constantly scrutinizing the small operations and borderline markets where iconoclastic and innovative programming occurs. When such programming shows popular success, these interests gather and shape the iconoclasm into an eminently salable commodity. When deejays at independent stations began playing popular music in the late forties and early fifties, Todd Storz and others tightened playlists and standardized programming. Under the slogan of "more music," the Drake stations in the mid-'60s ratcheted the Top 40 formula down to a playlist of thirty or even twenty songs, and further reduced the role of the deejay. Today we find a plethora of formats, each designed to appeal to a very specific audience—particularly audiences defined by the demographic and psychographic characteristics most attractive to advertisers. Stations intent on avoiding the possibility of alienating prized demographic groups have made audience research a fetish and stringently restricted programming practices. The Austin market presently has more than thirty commercial radio stations, each aimed at a highly specific audience niche. Their owners, however, avoid innovation and diversity, save in the most superficial ways. The illusion of choice is actually very little choice at all.

The industrial oligopolies of the past have been resurrected in different form: the networks of the twenties and thirties have been replaced by the chain owners of today. Yet the confluence of social, technological, and economic factors in the 1950s led to a fundamental redefinition of radio's cultural practices and effects, transforming it from a monolith of middlebrow culture into a mosaic of voices and values. Amid the extremes of tail fin excess and gray-flannel-suit conformity that characterized the 1950s, the transformation of popular music radio proved that even what appear to be the most culturally banal and bleak times teem with vitality. The cultural and social explosions that radio helped detonate in the 1950s continue to resound today; as radio crosses the digital threshold into a new millennium, their echoes are more relevant than ever.

Notes

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1. Sterling, "Television" 67 indicates that 20% of radio network time was sponsored in 1927. By 1931 this figure rose to more than 36%. Although advertising grew quickly, we should be wary of overestimating its early dominance of network operations.

2. Douglas 227 states that 162 independent stations were exempt from the 1938 agreement. However, Sterling, *Electronic Media* table 171-A reports approximately 600 independent stations broadcasting in the late 1930s, nearly 50% of all stations on the air. We use this data for Figure 1.

3. Much of this material is taken from an archive at the Austin Historical Society, as well as Austin city directories and editions of the *Broadcasting Yearbook*. The archive contains a written reminiscence by former KTBC news director Paul Bolton, numerous station program schedules, and a number of undated articles and memoranda.

4. Also see Caro 99.

5. Among the initial owners were John Connally, later governor of Texas and secretary of the Treasury; US congressman Jake Pickle; Edward Clark, later ambassador to Australia; Robert Finney, who would become director of the Internal Revenue Service; Willard Deason, later an Interstate Commerce Commissioner; and three others.

6. While half of KTXN's employees were Hispanic, continuity (brief announcements and scripts) was written in English and translated into Spanish by the program director.

7. The 10 Oct. 1949 issue of *Sponsor* referred to "The Forgotten 15,000,000: Ten Billion a Year Negro Market Is Largely Ignored by National Advertisers." A second installment, published two weeks later, pointed out that local advertisers were benefiting from "Negro appeal" radio while national advertisers remained hesitant (cited in Barlow, *Voice Over*).

8. Precedents can be found in specialty shows on major-market independent stations, such as Lonnie Johnson's show on WPAP in New York City in 1929 and Jack Cooper's work in Chicago, as well as network remote broadcasts of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and others.

9. Commercial "country" music originated in the early 1920s with the development of markets for "hillbilly" music based on records, radio, touring, and song publishing. Initially it was lumped together with blues, jazz, cowboy songs, and ethnic records as a parochial "folk" music, recorded inexpensively on southern field trips and sold in regional markets at discount prices. Within a decade, however, a number of factors (a stable market for hillbilly records, the success of "barn dance" programming in radio and singing cowboys in film, and increased competition within the record industry) helped legitimate country and western in the music business—although it was still disdained by New York tastemakers. Following World War II Nashville became the established center for country music, built around Acuff-Rose publishing, recording studios, and WSM's *Grand Ole Opry* barn dance show. In 1949, the same year it redubbed its "race" chart as "rhythm and blues," *Billboard* changed the name of its "folk" chart to "country and western" (see Ennis; Peterson).

10. "Texas Folklife Resources and the George Washington Carver Museum Present a Tribute to the Reverend A. L. (Lavada) Durst: Dr. Hepcat at 80." Collection of the Austin Historical Museum. Durst also booked performers at Austin's Doris Miller Auditorium, including Ella Fitzgerald, Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, and James Brown.

11. KTXN Marketing Memorandum.

12. *Ibid.*

13. We arrive at this conclusion by analyzing program information provided by Summers.

14. Sterling, *Electronic Media* reports more detailed data supporting the same general conclusion (see tables 370-B and 370-C).

15. A Politz Research Report in 1953 indicated that 95% of US households had one or more radios, 32% had two, 23% had three to seven, and 52% had car radios (MacFarland, *Development* 29).

16. The classic country music shows that survived from radio's golden era through the rise of television—the *Grand Ole Opry*, the *Louisiana Hayride*, and WSM's *National Barn Dance*—also were broadcast evenings.

17. J. E. Moore, letter to Audrey Bateman, 27 Aug. 1982. Collection of the Austin Historical Society.

18. "Two Austin Stations."

19. "State of Austin Radio" 35–36. Although following a rigid Top 40 "clock system" based on the Storz model, the station's playlist was relatively diverse from a stylistic standpoint and reflected regional popularity. In addition to numerous early rockers, KOKE's Top 40 countdown for 31 Aug. 1959 lists country-and-western performers such as Conway Twitty and Homer and Jethro, as well as crooners such as Nat King Cole and Brook Benton.

20. It must be remembered, however, that Top 40 was a business success; its cultural implications require assessment by other criteria (Rothenbuhler). Also, the early Top 40 stations were located in smaller markets with fewer competitors, and self-promotion through contests and other means was an integral part of their strategies. This emphasis on station promotion led directly to ratings hyping, or promoting audience numbers independently of actual listener behavior in order to increase their ratings. When owners and managers seek to attract listeners independent of music programming, any ensuing success should not be interpreted as evidence of that music's popularity or the soundness of music programming decisions.

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CHAPTER 18**TURN ON . . . TUNE IN****The Rise and Demise of Commercial
Underground Radio**

Michael C. Keith

In 1966, as the country rocked from widespread social unrest, commercial radio went underground to do some rocking of its own. Thus began the brief but unique life span of one of the medium's most remarkable programming genres—underground radio, also known as free-form, alternative, and progressive radio.

A MULTITUDE OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS, as well as industry events, contributed to the rise of commercial underground stations. In the former case, the subterranean rumblings of the 1950s culminated in the volcanic eruption that was the 1960s. The hot ash of change descended upon the nation, transforming the political landscape. The stage, replete with trap door to the counterculture underground, was in place. Social critics and scholars of the period have pointed out that the era was marked by a unique convergence of elements—and agglomeration seldom before witnessed.

Seeding the Underground

In a decade-end review of the 1960s *Life* magazine called the period's images “[v]iolent, nostalgic, preposterous, maddening, amusing, sometimes immensely evocative and moving” (“Images” 72).

For many, the catalytic element in this simmering caldron was the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Things would never be the same again,

despaired a nation of shocked and bereaved mourners. Kennedy had inspired a renewed desire for change, a sense that all good and noble things were possible and attainable, but Camelot was gone, and what lay ahead resembled Hades more than the recent empyrean past. Further assassinations, racial upheaval, and an undeclared war were around the corner. All of these things, along with the growing use of mind-altering drugs, primarily by young people, contributed to the blossoming of the so-called counterculture.

Other factors thickened the stew of the time. "Irrationalism, existential anxiety, the sheer numbers of adolescents with not much to do, all led to the blooming of the counterculture," noted Charles R. Morris in his noteworthy study of the period (Morris 81). In a more recent work Terry H. Anderson posits the widely held view that disfavor with the political norm of the day seeded the clouds of dissent: "The counterculture must be defined broadly. The movement developed as a counter to the political establishment. The counterculture was a counter to the dominant cold war culture" (241).

In one of the landmark publications on the 1960s, *The Making of a Counterculture*, Theodore Roszak argues that the youth rebellion was born of "[t]he machine tooling [of young people] to the needs of our various baroque bureaucracies: corporate, governmental, military, trade union, educational" (Roszak 16).

Continuing, Roszak observes,

The young stand forth so prominently because they act against a background of nearly pathological passivity on the part of the adult generation. . . . The fact is, it is the young who have in their amateurish, even grotesque, way, gotten dissent off the adult drawing board. (23, 26)

Rozsak goes on to point out that drugs played a key role in this disavowal of young people for adult society, while simultaneously leading them astray.

Psychedelic experience participates significantly in the young's most radical rejection of the parental society. Yet it is their frantic search for the pharmacological panacea, which tends to distract many of the young from all that is most valuable in their rebellion, and which threatens to destroy their most promising sensibilities. (155)

Ultimately a common cause solidified the youth movement in a way that threatened the status quo so cherished by the mainstream. "A common composite enemy—the Vietnam War, racism, global imperialism—was the prime unifying force, leading to shared demonstrations and occupations," wrote David Caute (36), who defined counterculture as

[a] term that embraces a plethora of disparate notions: dropout hippies, obscene language, acid trips, underground newspapers, and

films, alternative theatre with attendant “happenings,” anti-universities, surreal street politics, communal self-help, folk and rock music alien to ears attuned to Beethoven or the Palm Court Orchestra, mystical cults, aggressive sexuality, flamboyant clothing, ecological awareness, rejection of ambition and careerism. (xiii)

As former underground radio deejay Jim Ladd recounts in his memoir, “The Big Bang of consciousness in the late 1960’s ignited a tangible sense of wonder and commitment unique in history. And it was against this backdrop, or more accurately because of it, that FM radio was born” (LADD 5).

Underground media, principally newspapers and to a lesser degree the airwaves, served, or believed they served, the constituency experiencing this newfound consciousness. It was a mind-set both disturbing and troublesome to most of the nation’s leadership. Remarked Richard Nixon at the GOP’s presidential nominating convention in 1968, “They call themselves flower children. I call them spoiled rotten. But a new voice is being heard across America today. It is not the voice of the protesters, the shouters. It is the voice of the Americans who have been forgotten. The non-demonstrators. They’re the good people. . . . They’re the great silent majority.”

Underground radio would also be a “new voice . . . heard across America.” In addition to examining the genesis of this unique voice, the discussion that follows will delve into its nature (traits, elements, and attributes) and explore the impact it had on its audience as well as on the radio industry.

People’s Radio

Underground broadcasters prided themselves on the relationship they established with their listeners. The abiding principle behind this kind of radio was service. The goal was to be as relevant and responsive to the community of license—the “tribe,” as it was called—as possible. To accomplish this estimable objective, underground stations opened their microphones to individuals and groups that typically had been alienated or disenfranchised by mainstream, conservative media. Members of the Black Panthers went on the air at KMPX/KSAN to raise awareness of the rampant hunger confronting children in the ghetto. Antiwar demonstrators shared airtime with underground deejays, who themselves opposed the government’s role in Vietnam. Stations provided drug analysis services (“Pharm Chem,” as it was called by KSAN) to help ensure the safety of their drug-using constituency.

Underground outlets participated in and inspired the political rallies that promoted counterculture agendas. Massive antiwar demonstrations, widespread race rioting, and bloody clashes with police helped sustain commercial underground radio’s altruistic view of itself—a view shared by many of its fans, if not

its critics. These were the first commercial broadcast stations to fervently pursue the coveted counterculture nomenclature of the period—"activist."

At the very least this activism created strong audience loyalty, if only modestly fanning the flames of the '60s counterculture movement. Ultimately it is impossible to quantify the claims of many of its proponents and practitioners that the underground radio medium contributed in any significant way to the social behavior and political actions of the period.

In the Soil of the Field

FM stereo was commercial underground radio's laboratory. It was where experimentation was allowed, because there was so little to lose. Until the mid-1960s, FM moved along in low gear. A nearly negligible listenership provided it with little status and currency among the general public and industry. It was perceived as the province of eggheads and the terminally unhip—the place to tune for Stravinsky and fine arts programming. Dialing FM for most people was like attending a foreign film with subtitles when there was a new action-packed John Wayne movie just around the corner. Most twenty-year-olds had never tuned to a station between 88 and 108 MHz. Why should they? The cool music and wacky deejays were all over the AM band.

During the first two decades of its existence—the 1940s to the 1960s—FM's audience never amounted to more than a fraction of its static-ridden, monophonic precursor, AM, and this was to the great chagrin of independent FM operators in particular. A significant number of FM licenses were held by AM stations, which simulcast their standard broadcast band signals over their FM airwaves. This was done for the sole purpose of economics. Combo licensees saw little reason to originate programming for those scant few who tuned to FM frequencies. It would not be cost-efficient; thus they simply duplicated what was on their profitable AM side.

To the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) this ultimately constituted a lack of effective use of the band, which impeded and inhibited its ability to grow and flourish. After lengthy urging by unhappy stand-alone FM operators, who felt that combo simulcasting represented a primary deterrent to their success, the commission ruled that AM broadcasters in areas with more than a hundred thousand residents could not duplicate their signals for more than half of their broadcast day. This sent shock waves through the combo operator community, which feared a drain on its profits and resources.

This action, however, proved to be a landmark ruling for FM, whose ceiling of opportunity was significantly heightened when it could finally break the shackles that forced it to be little more than an echo chamber Cinderella of its big bad AM sister. It could now legitimately set out on its own, unimpaired, on the path leading to a long-awaited success. Reported the *Wall Street Journal*:

FM progressive radio began in the mid-1960's when the Federal Communications Commission ruled that companies that owned AM-FM combination stations had to program them separately. Because FM wasn't a money-maker, many stations became a laboratory for new progressive rock music, the antithesis of Top 40. (10)

In FM's bag of tricks were a superior signal—one that was static-free—and the ability to broadcast in stereo. The time was right to profit from these attractive features, since consumers were becoming increasingly eager to invest in home stereophonic equipment. Providing a necessary impetus for the marketing of two-channel sound were the recording companies, which were producing more stereo records, and not just by classical music artists, as had previously been the case.

The eagerness of AM-FM combo broadcasters to cut their potential losses led some to alternative forms of programming, observed Top 40 legend Bruce ("Cousin Brucie") Morrow.

What the hell could you put on FM that wouldn't cost an arm and a leg and drain your AM operation? Hey, how about album cuts? Rather than simulate the sound of the Top Forty format, they could simulate the growing drug culture with the way out music that went along with marijuana and recreational pharmaceuticals. The owners reasoned that they could hire strange hippies as FM disc jockeys, letting them play whatever they thought their contemporaries wanted to hear. And, best of all, since they would be on "underground" FM stations, they wouldn't command big salaries like their AM counterparts. (Morrow 175).

The increasing popularity of rock albums among youth also helped encourage some FM stations to abandon their conventional fare and launch themselves on a quest for disenfranchised and disenfranchised radio users—those who had rejected the 45-rpm-driven, pop-chart radio outlets. By the 1960s, reported the *Los Angeles Times*, "[a]lbums with their longer songs, more sophisticated musical stylings and challenging themes, had become the choice of the young rock audience that was most passionate about music" (Parachine 4).

Things were finally happening in the "magic" medium, and this excited young broadcasters, who had begun to lose hope that they could ever achieve a more creative and stimulating kind of radio. It was time to bid farewell to the "theater of the mindless."

Surfacing the Underground

On the radio format tree, underground has a variety of ancestral branches and limbs. The programming genre is directly related to what may be most accu-

rately called free-form radio, which had its roots in the nocturnal experimentation of a handful of AM stations and fledgling FM outlets and in the eclecticism found at some of their commercial-free counterparts in the lower portion of the megahertz band.

The individuals who had a chief role in the development of the commercial underground sound were, not so oddly, radio people to begin with: that is to say, folks who derived their income working the airwaves, many at stations for whose programming they felt little passion. In fact, more than a few emigrated from the pop-chart venues dominating the radio scene at the time.

When discussions take place about who were among the earliest pioneers of the underground radio phenomenon, dozens of names are bandied about, most commonly Tom O'Hair, Scott Muni, Dace Pierce, Allen Shaw, Mike Harrison, Tom Gamache, Scoop Nisker, Rosko, Murray the K, Ed Bear, Stefan Ponek, Bob McClay, Raechel Donahue, Charles Laquidara, Voco Cash, Tim Powell, and so on. Some cite early-1960s noncommercial broadcasters, such as Bob Fass and Larry Yurdin, as the preeminent practitioners and innovators of the genre. There are even deejays from 1950s radio who make the list, such as Detroit's Buck Matthews.

However, the individuals most often placed at the top of the list are Tom Donahue and Larry Miller. There are differing opinions as to which of these men should wear the dubious crown "father of underground radio," but Tom Donahue most often gets the nod. Meanwhile, there are as many stations claiming to have debuted the genre as there are those who claim to have innovated the sound. Once again, however, only two are most frequently cited, and they are KMPX-FM in San Francisco and WOR-FM in New York.

While these two stations are traditionally accorded landmark status, the coming of the underground format was foreshadowed by other stations as early as the 1950s. For example, WJR-AM in Detroit featured the Buck Matthews show, which mixed all kinds of music together in a fairly unrestricted, free-form way. Matthews employed a conversational, laid-back announcer style as well, which was untypical of the day.

Other precursors to FM underground radio could be found on the AM band. For instance, Chicago's WCFL-AM offered a free-form mix of rock music in the first half of the sixties, and a little later in the decade Newton, Massachusetts, had progressive rock over WNTN-AM. Other low-power AM stations experimented with an "open" approach to music programming, despite the fact that the format was nearly the exclusive province of FM.

A number of early noncommercial stations presaged the arrival of commercial underground radio. Perhaps most significant among them are WBAI-FM and WFMU-FM. At the former, a young deejay named Bob Fass worked the overnight slot, airing a program called *Radio Unnamable*. Wrote Lynda Crawford in the *East Village Other*:

Taking the concept of freeform (or birthing it himself?), he began with music, music that no other radio station played, but most important, all kinds of music. He set out to show that all music relates to each other and that none of it has to be categorized. . . . The show was completely free, and there you had freeform. Other stations, particularly college stations, began picking up on Bob's show and trying to duplicate it, and then eventually, when it looked as if it might be profitable because of its popularity, commercial radio entered the game. WOR-FM was the first. (Crawford)

Across the river in New Jersey, college station WFMU-FM's Larry Yurdin was doing much the same thing, observed Steve Post in the *Village Voice*. "When the big boys in broadcasting noticed that WBAI and WFMU—of all stations—along with a handful of others around the country were getting respectable FM ratings, they smelled something profitable and invested in the 'youth'" (49).

Undoubtedly, like those mentioned above, others helped set the stage for the surfacing of commercial underground radio, which got under way at about the same time on both coasts.

Most radio historians point to WOR-FM in New York as the first commercial outlet to break from the "primary" or single-format approach to music programming. Writes Peter Orlik, "Beginning in 1966 on New York's WOR-FM, the format known as Progressive or Free Form rejected shouting Top 40 deejays and the formal voices found on adult stations. In their place, progressive enlisted laid-back, conversational communicators who featured album cuts excluded from conventional playlists" (Orlik 193).

In their retrospective on radio after the arrival of television, media observers Peter Fornatale and Joshua Mills make no bones about which station they believe set the commercial underground wheels in motion—WOR-FM. "The evidence clearly shows that Tom Donahue, the so-called 'father of progressive radio,' did not take his first steps until March 1967" (Fornatale and Mills 131).

The free-form experiment at WOR lasted only a few months, and the station was on to other things by the time KMPX-FM in San Francisco introduced Donahue's version of the format in the spring of the following year. New York was not long without a commercial underground station, however. WNEW-FM took up the challenge, at least part time, in October 1967.

When WOR-FM's non-format was changed in 1967 to the RKO standardized approach instituted by Bill Drake, Muni and some of the station's progressive air personalities and music programmers had to find another home. WNEW-FM took them in and ran with the ball. (Harrison 38)

While the game of musical chairs was being played on the East Coast, the opposite coast witnessed the launch of its first commercial underground signal



A different kind of radio for a different kind of time.

at a less-than-auspicious broadcast outlet in San Francisco. KMPX was housed in a warehouse at 50 Green Street, which was by the docks at the northern edge of the city.

A few months after assuming the programming reins at KMPX-FM, Tom Donahue took on its sister station, KPPC-FM, in southern California, simultaneously working his magic at both. The underground radio programming genre, the “nonformat” format, was beginning to make a sound that was being heard not only at both ends of the country but in between as well.

In 1968 dozens of stations around the United States were offering listeners their own brand of underground radio. Most large metropolitan areas boasted what many were calling “flower power” stations, including cities such as Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, and St. Louis. This was no longer an avant-garde form of radio restricted to the urbane enclaves of the East and West, as sociologist Terry H. Anderson observed.

Freaks established and tuned into a few hip FM stereo stations. KMPX and KSAN in the Bay Area, WBAI or “Radio Unnamable” in New York, and “Up Against the Wall FM” in Madison were some of the first, and soon other listener-sponsored stations went on the air in many other cities, including Los Angeles, Houston, and Washington, D.C. All playing the music and all giving clues to the counterculture. (Anderson 246)

At this early stage in underground radio’s evolution, two stations were frequently held up as models of the genre—KSAN and WNEW. Both were doing reasonably well attracting listeners and advertisers. While often compared, the stations had forged their own distinct personas. In her organizational analysis of KSAN Susan Krieger notes that WNEW’s program director perceived a difference in the way the two stations went about designing their programming:

He felt their approaches were different in that Donahue had introduced his change at KMPX in opposition to abuses on Top 40 radio, he had been idealistic about it, while on WNEW-FM, they were more technical and analytic in their thinking. They thought about changing the format in terms of what makes good radio and good business sense. Their thinking was that album cuts had an intellectual appeal, and that the programming should be compatible with the style of the music. (Krieger 176)

By late 1968 there were over five dozen commercial underground radio stations in operation around the country. The following summer San Francisco alone could claim a half dozen, while New York could boast only half that figure. One company (Metromedia) owned the two stations that *Billboard* magazine ranked as the two top underground stations in the country—KSAN and WNEW.

The Sound That Rebounds, Resounds, and Rebounds

By describing the underground format as the antidote to Top 40, Tom Donahue wanted to make it amply clear to everyone that things were being done quite differently at his station. In fact, not only did he reject the notion of labeling things, he felt the term *format* itself had little to do with his new brand of radio. Calling it the “antiformat” format, however, would not have offended him quite as much. Nonetheless, there was a plan, a design, behind his seemingly pell-mell approach to station programming.

In a *Rolling Stone* article written the same year Donahue debuted his programming concept at KMPX, he reluctantly applied the term *format* to explain the essence of his unique approach: “It is a format that embraces the best of today’s rock and roll, folk, traditional and city blues, reggae, electronic music, and some jazz and classical selections” (Donahue 14).



WABX-FM station logo.

WABX-FM station logo.

Although Donahue would concede that anything with even an implied structure may be said to possess some kind of form—ergo *format*, as applied to radio programming—his central point was that the deejays at his station ultimately shaped what went out over the air. They were the creators and curators of the sound.

Echoing Donahue's position, Julius Lester drew an astute picture of this radio genre: "It's a place where the program director is free to do whatever he wants—play records, talk, take phone calls on the air, eat his dinner, belch, etc. . . . Freeform radio is an art form. The airwaves are the empty canvas, the producer the artist, and the sound is the paint" (Lester xiii).

Decades later, when Donahue alumnus Ben Fong-Torres wrote about his former employer, it could well have served as a description for all underground radio operations of the time. "Back in the early '70's, KSAN ('Jive 95') was the hippest all of stations and, among young listeners, the only spot on the dial worth tuning in. It was freeform, free-for-all radio; intensely personal and political; outrageous and unpredictable, much like the '60's scene that inspired its birth" (Fong-Torres E1).

It was music, however, that most defined underground stations and at the same time distinguished them from the rest of the pack on either AM or FM. Music was the prime element of the genre's esoteric mix, the sacred ingredient

that made synthesis possible. It was the axis of the underground sphere. *Eclectic* is the word that best describes the presentation of music on underground stations. In his memoir about his days at KSAN, Scoop Nisker writes that the station aired music without regard to category or genre and “in sublime segues and sets of sounds that took listeners on soaring, imaginative musical flights” (52).

I remember deejay Edward Bear, one freeform night on KSAN, playing a Buffalo Springfield tune that segued into a Mozart sonata, which he then mixed in and out of a Balinese gamelan piece—the counterpoints cross-culturally counter pointing with each other—and then resolved the whole set with some blues from John Lee Hooker. (Nisker 53)

This musical ecumenism was evident at underground stations around the country. For instance, in Detroit WABX worked diligently to break the standard musical mode found everywhere in radio. Observed underground aficionado Mike Gormley, “The programming at ’ABX is creative and unpredictable. There’s a lot of rock but every other kind of music gets played with it. Whatever works for the mood, the idea or the theme the on-air man is developing” (Gormley 6).

The way in which music was presented by undergrounders was unlike that of any other contemporary radio station. Interestingly, if not ironically, these new outlets did draw from an older adult format, one that was responsible for bringing the FM band to a larger audience in the 1960s. Its name was Beautiful Music or, as many called it, “elevator music.” It was the Muzak format of the radio world. The common ground between the two seemingly disparate forms of radio programming was the manner in which they structured music into sweeps—that is, uninterrupted segments or blocks, typically of a quarter hour in length. Evolving from the sweep approach was the idea of music sets, wherein a series of songs would establish a particular theme or motif.

Just as the approach to music programming in underground was antithetical to conventional AM radio, particularly Top 40, announcing styles were no less contrary to the long-standing norm. Since radio’s inception in the early 1920s, announcing techniques have undergone relatively subtle changes, never wandering too far from the affected “radioese” presentation style. The old-line announcer style, characterized by its formality and self-consciousness, remained prevalent well into the second coming of the radio medium, which followed the arrival of television.

The “stilts,” as they have been called, found their way into the FM band as well, migrating to the Beautiful Music format and others. In fact they had been there all along, performing various announcing chores—“And now we take you back to Symphony Hall for the second act of Verdi’s superlative opera, *Aida*.” However, in fairness to early FM announcers, there was an attempt to shed a

modicum of AM's microphone histrionics and attenuate the hyperbolic enunciation and projection so rampant at the pop music and top-of-the-chart outlets.

The underground radio voice would bring to fuller realization this early effort to mitigate the disingenuous affectations and mannerisms—the hype—on the airwaves. Meanwhile, sounding “hip” was considered acceptable and even preferable, but not hip like the Top 40 jocks. On this point, industry publisher Eric Rhoads acknowledges that the “stoned” radio announcer persona projected by underground stations was often an integral part of the radio genre’s identity. “The personalities were soft-spoken, low key and sounded stoned (most probably were). . . . [It] was loose” (Rhoads 309).

As with all radio stations, there are other ingredients besides the music and announcing that contribute to their general appeal, identity, and overall listenability. News and information broadcasts represent one of those elements. Despite the underground programming genre’s dominant emphasis on album music designed for an under-thirty crowd, it differed from other youth-oriented music outlets in that news was frequently regarded as an integral part of what many of these stations sought to convey to their public. That is, they wished to be construed as members of the socially conscious community and not simply record machine operators.

The prevailing form that radio news assumed after the introduction of programming specialization in the 1950s and 1960s was the five-minute update (“roundup”), usually at the top of the hour. Because the FCC required that broadcasters dedicate a percentage of their schedules to for news and public affairs, even stations targeting the youth demographic were obliged to “stop the music” and “air the news.” The idea at these stations was to deal with the perceived “tune-out factor” as quickly and as innocuously as possible. “Kids want to hear the hot hits, not what’s happening in the world” was the familiar refrain at pop-chart stations. Meanwhile, at those outlets promoting “more music and less talk”—such as Beautiful Music, the disdain for news obligations was no less in evidence.

When it came to promoting underground stations, every effort was made to create an image of social compassion and hipness. This strategy was amply apparent at KSAN, for example, where the morning deejay, Bob Prescott, read from the *I Ching* and aired offbeat features thick with sound effects, highly editorialized newscasts, and bizarre contests, all especially geared to advance the underground radio cause.

The Ersatz Underground

Not everyone felt comfortable with the designation *underground* for this brand of radio. It mystified some and embarrassed others. It was too weighty for more than a few broadcasters and media critics. The term, with its clandestine and

subversive connotations, was wholly inappropriate, thought Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, who scoffed at the notion that stations that could readily be tuned on any receiver from the White House to Shaker Heights could be a part of the legitimate underground movement. His view was shared from within the broadcast industry, including some who worked the new programming sound.

Reflecting this attitude is a programming policy statement composed and distributed by Ed Shane, who programmed WPLO-FM in Atlanta in the late 1960s:

Because we are so label-conscious these days, the label "underground" has stuck to radio stations that could never be underground, owing to their control by the FCC. Actually "underground" is a strictly political term that connotes a never-seen network of spies and counterspies, who might command guerrilla attacks. True underground stations pop up during times of political unrest, and they are true undergrounds. They broadcast propaganda until they are discovered by their enemies and destroyed. So the term "underground," as applied to this kind of radio, is really inaccurate and inappropriate. I prefer "contemporary attitude" radio. (Shane)

Tom Donahue was not a proponent of the term, but he also felt that labels such as *progressive*, *free-form*, and *alternative* were not much better. He may well have preferred Shane's moniker.

The perspective among many mainstream broadcasters and media observers was that the format had a lot less to do with political ideals than it did with the fact that its practitioners were a bunch of social misfits and industry rejects. This was the view of Top 40 maven Bruce Morrow: "They were a whole different breed. Lots of these guys were like college kids who had to start their own fraternities because none of the mainstream frats would have them" (Morrow 176).

The views of a substantial number of social and political historians and analysts suggest that the themes embraced by the counterculture protesters in the streets were not consistently reflected in the day-to-day banter of these self-styled underground radio stations, whose *raison d'être*, they contend, had more to do with album rock and flower power than it did with the long, hard march toward social and cultural transformation and reform.

Turn On, Tune In . . . Turn Off

Writer Tom Wolfe characterized the transition from the 1960s to the years that followed as the move from the "we generation" to the "me generation." (Wolfe 40) Communal spirit was eventually supplanted by the corporate climber men-

tality (“greed is good”). Psychedelically painted VW buses were traded in for slick, expensive status symbols. BMWs were the new flavor of the day. Baby boomers were turning in their beads and lava lamps for hot tubs, polyester leisure suits, and gold chains. The civic fires were fading to flickering embers. The war in Vietnam was winding down, and inner cities were slipping into what would become a long siege of complacency and decay. Protesters were abandoning their peace signs and placards.

The counterculture movement was getting long in the tooth in the seventies, and many of its members were embracing more-mainstream and traditional goals and aspirations, if not values. The pot and chemically laced brownies of the flower child were replaced by killer heroin and crack cocaine peddled by armed dealers and pushers. For many it was a good time to finally grow up and assume the mantle of adult responsibility. The anger and altruism inherent in rock music for nearly a decade bowed to the jejune patter and rhythms of disco and new wave—“corporate rock.” Underground radio became a thing of the past as baby boomers sought a less uncertain and chaotic future, taking refuge in that once unsavory realm known as the “material world.” Had we come full circle? many wondered, including writer Richard Goldstein:

There were other . . . reminders that the counterculture bubble was about to burst. The promise of rock music—its vision of a multiracial community of the young—has been subverted by a record industry bloated on profit. The same entrepreneurial feeding frenzy has reduced the psychedelic experience to dayglo chatchkas, while its gurus scurried for the shelter of the wealthy, remote from the battlegrounds of civil rights and Vietnam. Our faith in the individual was proving to be the ultimate marketable commodity. . . . With the rise of Nixon’s silent majority, the counterculture fell into a numb silence. (Goldstein xix)

A survey of published perspectives and conventional wisdom on the 1960s and 1970s and on the underground radio phenomenon itself revealed that numerous factors came into play—factors that ultimately contributed to the format’s swift fade from the airwaves.

At the start of 1970 a *Life* magazine poll conducted by Louis Harris showed “a surprising feeling of tolerance and commitment” among most Americans (“Into” 114). The turbulence of the preceding years seemed to be subsiding.

The erosion in the numbers of underground outlets began shortly into the 1970s. For many listeners, the format was losing its pertinence to their everyday lives, but by this time listener apathy had supplanted listener activism, or so it seemed. There were no huge protests or demonstrations as these stations succumbed to the pressures of the executive boardroom and became the cash cows that management had long dreamed they would become. The developing mind-

set of the period took the baby boomer generation in another direction, one that led it away from the 1960s message of underground radio. After 1970 the movement turned inward.

Reflecting on the evolving social environment, undergrounder Tom O'Hair observed. "If KSAN and other successful underground stations have changed. . . it's because 'society' has changed since '68 and '69" (Bernstein 92). O'Hair went on to comment that underground radio in the 1970s had become less political and broader in its appeal, reflecting that change. The tide had shifted away from the old underground rallying call of "Together we stand" to the mantra of the new gestalt, "Take care of number one," and the corporations were back at the helm. Money was *the* thing once again, if it hadn't been all along.

Note

This paper is based on the author's book *Voices in the Purple Haze: Underground Radio and the Sixties* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997).

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CHAPTER 19**LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION****American Public Radio in a World of Infinite Possibilities**

Jack Mitchell

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES PRESENT both threat and opportunity to public radio as well as to commercial radio. These new technologies will spawn a threatening torrent of competition that will force all radio broadcasters to redefine their roles. Hundreds of channels will rain down from satellites, stream into homes and offices from the Internet, and even flood automobiles when the Internet goes wireless. Local radio broadcasters will lose their franchise on formats and will have to compete with broadcasters, cablecasters, satellitecasters, and Netcasters around the world. Broadcasters will lose control over program sequencing when listeners can order audio on demand and get exactly what they want whenever they want it. Organizations not traditionally in the audio business will offer audio and add to the competition. Newspaper and magazine Web sites, for example, will provide video and audio in addition to their traditional text and pictures. All media are potentially multimedia (Avery “Public”; Tracey).

The new technologies will also present the opportunity for coverage expansion and program diversity. Any radio station can now extend its signal around the world. On-demand services could create a new market for produced programs such as radio drama and documentaries, long deemed obsolete in the United States. If other media provide audio, radio broadcasters will be able to provide text, pictures, and video to their listeners. Possibilities for radio broadcasters who merely transmit content they do not own are limited, but for those who produce their own unique content, they are unlimited. Opportunity abounds too for broadcasters with an intensely loyal audience, from whom they

command affection and respect. Such stations can extend that affection and respect to multimedia content designed for their audiences.

Commercial stations will succeed in this more intensely competitive environment by focusing even more narrowly on the characteristics that bring success today. For most stations success comes from providing targeted services unique in their communities. For some “heritage” stations success derives from their status as a community institution. Success in the future will result from an even more powerful commitment to serve ever more narrow market segments by providing uniquely specialized content. It will derive, too, from strengthening already strong relationships with listeners, whether they sell their programming to advertisers seeking a targeted audience or directly to listeners through e-commerce sales or some type of subscription service.

Public radio seems in a relatively strong position to survive the threat and maximize opportunity in a more competitive world. Public radio is accustomed to serving narrow niche markets too small to interest commercial broadcasters. Public radio still produces programs in genres such as documentaries and dramas, suitable for on-demand listening. Public radio generates and owns unique content that could expand into multimedia formats. Public radio is a respected institution in many communities. National Public Radio is probably the most respected broadcast organization in the country. Public radio commands exceptional loyalty from a select group of well-educated, high-income listeners—a truly elite demographic, a marketer’s dream (Giovannoni, “Public”; Thomas and Clifford, “Audience”).

The first of these advantages, however, is only an apparent one and will evaporate as the new technologies emerge. Public radio was once the refuge for programming aimed at niches too small to interest commercial services. In most communities, only public radio provided niche music such as classical, opera, jazz, blues, folk, bluegrass, big band, or gospel. Only public radio aired programs for often-ignored segments of the population such as the Hmong in Wisconsin or gays almost everywhere. As commercial stations narrow their niches, however, they will begin to view these former public radio enclaves as commercially viable. Indeed, each of two satellite services proposed to launch around 2001 will provide five specialized streams of classical music alone. Any program niche—certainly any music niche—too small to interest commercial services in the new competitive world will prove too small to interest public radio.

Public radio’s other advantages are real and ripe for exploitation. Experience in program production, ownership of unique content, the respect of its audience, and its audience’s highly desirable demographic will allow public radio to take advantage of the opportunity that comes with the new technologies. In doing so, however, public radio will face temptations, tantalizing possibilities that could cost public radio its soul, its reason for being. For example, people

who read serious books are highly likely to listen to public radio. Publishers know that an author interview on public radio will spike sales of a book because that audience reads. Public radio broadcasters might be tempted to use their Web sites to sell the books of the authors they interview. That, in turn, might lead to public radio's selecting for interviews those authors whose books are most likely to sell well.

The challenge for public radio, I contend, is to take advantage of the opportunity to enhance its public service role without transforming itself into something else that sounds an awful lot like commercial broadcasting. My admonition to public radio to stick with its mission does not grow out of blind idealism. Rather, I see that mission as public radio's shield against the threat of torrential competition, as its main competitive advantage. If public radio adopts quasi-commercial values, it will dive into the new competitive world and likely drown. Plans for public radio's future should flow from its mission.

It is now a cliché that the railroad industry declined because its leaders thought they were in the railroad business rather than the transportation business. If those leaders had seen their business as transportation, they would have embraced air transport and a bright future. Aware of that cliché, some in public radio want to see themselves in the information or media business, not the radio business. From its base in broadcasting, they maintain, public radio should move aggressively into the new multimedia world. Nothing is inherently wrong with their conclusion, but everything is wrong with their premise. Public radio's business is not information, media, or even radio. Its business is public service. Public radio cannot plan a successful future without committing itself fully to that fundamental business. Public radio must recall what public service has meant through the years as it considers what it might mean in the future.

The Public Service Ideal

Public schools, colleges, universities, museums, libraries, parks, and gardens provide education, enlightenment, and enjoyment funded by and available to all. These institutions do not seek a profit, and only the most ideological of free-marketeers believe they should. Radio could have developed along this public model just as logically as along the for-profit, advertising-based model that prevailed (McChesney). The purpose here is not to explain why America made the choices it did in the 1920s and 1930s but to point out that subsequent events have substantiated the wisdom of the minority who predicted that commercial forces would crush public service ideals.

At the end of the nineteenth century American society displayed the inevitable effect of capitalism: wealth and power concentrated in the hands of a few. The Progressive movement arose in reaction to this concentration and sought political and economic democracy through active government interven-

tion. Progressive reformers advocated antitrust, child labor, wage-and-hour, and public safety laws reflecting their belief that the public needed to limit the negative results of a market economy. They also advocated laws on the direct election of senators, the civil service, primary elections, and initiatives and referenda, reflecting their parallel belief that the public needed to wrest control of government from those same economic interests. They declared the profit motive incompatible with the public service role of media. They had watched turn-of-the-century newspapers in a competitive scramble to build circulation so as to maximize their profits. They saw that scramble sink into the sensationalism of yellow journalism. An unfettered commercial marketplace, they declared, destroyed a vigorous marketplace of ideas, the rationale behind the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Public ownership of some media fit neatly into the progressive ideology. No area of public life, after all, was more subject to abuse by the plutocracy than the mass media. If progressives feared concentrated power in the steel, railroad, and oil industries, they had a greater fear of concentrated power in the industries that defined public debate and shaped public opinion. Media run primarily or exclusively to maximize private profit served private interests, not the free marketplace of ideas essential to democracy. Progressive editor Hamilton Holt addressed a conference on media reform in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1912. He spoke about newspapers, but his argument would apply equally to any commercial medium, including radio. He told the delegates that every community should have profit-oriented commercial newspapers, privately endowed nonprofit newspapers, and government-supported newspapers. Those government-supported newspapers would resemble state-supported public universities, committed to research (investigation), teaching (reporting), and public service. The profit-oriented press, he said, did not and could never serve democracy as the founding fathers had intended, “[b]ecause it does not PAY to be as thorough or impartial as the ideal paper should be. A self-supporting journal must be sensational. It must give undue prominence to spectacular events and crowd out quieter but more important movements” (*Proceedings* 114). All words spoken and written on these issues since have merely elaborated Holt’s basic indictment.

America’s decision to place the marketplace of ideas in the commercial marketplace differed from most other countries’ choice. Britain’s noncommercial BBC, for example, offered radio programming that provided cultural uplift, continuing education, social integration, inculcation of values, and discussion of public issues in addition to entertainment. Defenders of America’s system could rightly point out that the BBC’s monopoly meant Britons had no choice but to submit themselves to the “eat your spinach” programming of their national radio service. Given the choice, most citizens would probably have chosen the more entertaining, less demanding American system. The BBC’s founder, Lord John Reith, would not have disagreed with that fact; rather, he would have seen

it as confirming the necessity of broadcasting remaining a public service monopoly to prevent listeners from having the option to make bad choices. Reith's paternalistic philosophy was anything but democratic. It was no less democratic, however, than subordinating the marketplace of ideas to the economic marketplace in a commercial system.

The handful of university-owned, noncommercial radio stations in the United States in the 1920s and '30s sought to emulate the BBC philosophy, but without the benefit of Reith's monopoly and the resources generated by the licensee fee charged to every radio set owner in Britain. American educational radio stations served "spinach" of far lower quality than in Britain and had to serve it on the same plate with an overwhelming array of tantalizing sweets from American commercial radio. The results were predictably disappointing. Nonetheless, those educational radio pioneers remained true to the concept of a public institution. They provided programming available free to all, of benefit to all who chose to listen, and supportive of broader societal goals, just like public schools, public libraries, public universities, public museums, public zoos, and public parks (Avery, Kovitz, Stavitsky, and Witherspoon).

The Alternative Reality

Ultimately, public service broadcasters on both sides of the Atlantic would need to face reality, and both did so in the years immediately following World War II. British public broadcasters had to relent and meet the demand of listeners for more entertainment. The BBC ceased making its educational fare compulsory and replaced its single channel with three: the "home service," which provided basic news and entertainment; the "light service" with less-demanding programming, which quickly became the most popular; and the "Third Programme," which aired programming of intrinsic merit. American public broadcasters, accepting their tiny audiences, had to stop pretending that they were educating a nation or even a community. In both Britain and America, public service broadcasting needed new rationales. American educational radio determined to justify itself as a supplement, an alternative, to an entertainment-centered broadcasting system. The BBC used its new Third Programme to epitomize its public service role. The Third Programme gave journalists, essayists, poets, composers, playwrights, musicians, and academics a place to showcase their best work, work measured by their personal standards rather than by the standards of the marketplace. The Third Programme presented art for art's sake and ideas for ideas' sake. Anyone could choose to listen. If no one did, the quality programming was still there, existing for its own sake, providing an outlet for the creative and intellectual efforts of distinguished individuals in an array of fields (Mitchell). The public park designed for use by all turned into a wilderness preserve, valued for its own sake rather than its public use.

Just as American educational radio imitated the earlier Reithian BBC during its mass education period, it provided an anemic imitation of the British Third Programme during this “alternative” phase. Lacking the BBC’s resources, American educational radio was more likely to present a recording of a classroom lecture than a carefully crafted radio talk by a major intellectual figure. Nonetheless, American educational radio, seeing itself as an alternative, could ease its embarrassment at having such a tiny audience. Like the BBC’s Third Programme, American educational radio gave artists, journalists, and especially academics a chance to do programming that “ought” to exist. The size of its audience was secondary to the quality of its programming.

This programming-for-programming’s-sake philosophy was particularly useful in the postwar years, when the first twenty channels of the newly opened FM band were reserved for noncommercial, educational stations. In those years FM could hardly qualify as a mass medium. Radio still meant AM radio. Television, not FM, was the exciting new medium capturing the public imagination. The new generation of educational stations signing on to the FM band in the 1940s and ’50s did so in virtual anonymity. With a philosophy that placed the inherent importance of the programming above any listeners using the programming, these stations, and the institutions that owned them, launched their FM services confident that they were contributing to the public good, even if most of the public did not know it (Holt).

The Pacifica radio stations, which emerged on the FM dial in Berkeley, Los Angeles, and New York during this period, provided an interesting variation. Like Britain’s Third Programme and mainstream American educational radio, the Pacifica stations saw their role as presenting arts and ideas insufficiently popular to air on commercial radio (McKinney). Like the Third Programme and mainstream American educational radio, the Pacifica stations provided an outlet for those with something important to say, even if few people were interested in hearing it. Like the other two, Pacifica existed more for the sake of the broadcaster than for the sake of the audience. However, the broadcasters whom Pacifica served differed. Broadcasters on the Third Programme or on American educational radio represented the artistic and academic establishment. They lacked a popular following because their ideas or works were too elite, too esoteric, too abstract, too “boring” for popular tastes. Pacifica’s broadcasters lacked a popular following because their ideas or works were outside the mainstream, more radical than elite. No institution was more establishment than the Third Programme, and the educational radio stations of America’s colleges and universities were similarly respectable. Pacifica was decidedly antiestablishment. It depended not on funding from an educational institution but on direct contributions from its listeners. Pacifica did share with the Third Programme and American educational radio the belief that presenting important programming was enough, that reaching substantial audiences with that important programming was desirable, of course, but not essential.

Public Service, '60s Style

In the late '60s and early '70s public service radio renewed its interest in the impact of its programming. Again the BBC led the way. In April 1970, facing commercial radio competition for the first time, the BBC shocked Britain's cultural elite by killing its prestigious Third Programme. The BBC would no longer contentedly present quality material for its own sake. It would return to a variation of the original Reithian notion of providing quality material that actually reached significant numbers of people. Without its Reithian monopoly, the BBC could not operate with the same heavy-handed paternalism it had employed in the 1930s, but it recommitted itself to the principle that true communication takes place only when important programming actually reaches substantial audiences. The new BBC offered four formatted national radio services, each designed to both entertain and enlighten the distinct segment of the British population its format attracted. The BBC expected all four services to attract significant audiences. No longer would the BBC broadcast art for art's sake alone (Mitchell).

American educational radio, likewise, concluded that quality programming has value only if someone hears it. Rather than the threat of commercial competition, the possibility of substantial federal financial support spurred the change in the United States. The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) primarily to build a public television system to serve audiences too small to interest commercial, profit-seeking broadcasters (Carnegie, *Public Television*). The legislation envisioned a public television service that over the course of a week would reach a wide variety of specialized audiences sequentially. It saw public television presenting something of interest to just about everyone in society each week, but having an audience at any given time far smaller than any commercial broadcasting would demand.

The legislative process had given no attention to the unique challenges of public radio, which sneaked itself into the 1967 legislation. Finding itself mandated to establish a public radio service as well as a public television service, the CPB created National Public Radio to use federal funds for a noncommercial radio network that would contribute to the quality of American life. That assignment meant NPR had to produce programming of value—by some yet undefined standard—and present it in a way that would reach far more people than educational radio ever had.

The commercial radio environment of the late '60s, characterized by multiple, specialized, formatted stations, would not allow the new National Public Radio to follow the formula proposed for public television. It could not serve a sequence of specialized audiences by providing something for everyone over a period of time. To stand out in a multichannel competitive marketplace, public radio needed both distinctiveness and consistency. NPR would maintain consis-

tency not by following a focused music policy or aiming at a specific demographic target, as commercial broadcasters did, but by constant adherence to values against which it would measure all of its programming. The founding board of National Public Radio faced the task of defining those values, values that would make this new concept of public radio unique. The first staff members of National Public Radio faced the task of creating programs that would measure up to those values. Of course, the programs they created would also need to mesh with the listening habits of potential listeners and to compete in the media marketplace in which public radio would have to operate.

The public service values of Reith's BBC had been essentially Victorian, paternalistic, and class-conscious. America's version of public service broadcasting reflected the extension mission of state land-grant universities. While both contributed to the philosophy of American public radio, neither Reith's Victorian values nor extension's rural mission were sufficient for the new radio service that emerged in the late '60s and early '70s. Just as educational radio had grown out of American university campuses, the new public radio would grow from its university roots, but university campuses were different places in the '60s and '70s than they had been in the '20s and '30s. The '60s and '70s encompassed civil rights, the Vietnam War, and Watergate. Authority was out of fashion; participatory democracy was in. Lectures were out; discussions and student-organized teach-ins were in. Rural was out (except when middle-class kids went "back to the land"); urban was in. The Black Pride movement held out an image of America as a collection of minorities fighting for their interests against an entrenched power structure. The sensibility of rock music overwhelmed the sensibility of classical music or even jazz.

The members of National Public Radio's founding board all came from those activist campuses. All managed campus radio stations. Many had witnessed sit-ins, violent protests, and administrative and police overreactions. Many had smelled tear gas in their offices. In the winter and spring of 1970, during the same months in which campus demonstrations peaked, police shot student protesters at Kent State and Jackson State, and many campuses literally closed as students protested President Nixon's bombing of Cambodia, they met to define the values that would govern National Public Radio. Joe Gwathmey, manager of the University of Texas station at Austin and member of NPR's founding board, told his fellow board members that he had come to their meeting with the following assumptions:

1. That our society is in the midst of a revolution.
2. That the revolution is rooted in a reexamination of values.
3. That artificial barriers to understanding are common in our society.
4. That these barriers prevent us from making rational choices as we deal with the revolution.

5. That a means of eliminating barriers is needed.
6. That NPR is probably not the means—but might be.

Gwathmey went on to say that we know what other people are doing, but we don't know what they are "*thinking*, particularly in regard to such abstract and emotionally charged matters as values." He expressed doubt that people are willing to understand what others are thinking or that radio offered the best way to achieve that understanding, but he said that public radio had an obligation to try. Gwathmey advocated forsaking the filter of conventional journalism to give direct expression to diverse points of view. He proposed that NPR allow people to express what they "*think* is happening, not just what coolly objective reporters say is happening" (Gwathmey).

Another founding member, Karl Schmidt from the University of Wisconsin station in Madison, presented a similar analysis and argued that NPR needed to provide a place where:

- people talk with people
- people listen to people
- unities as well as dissensions are explored
- awareness of a shared humanity is emphasized
- rhetoric is de-escalated
- language is enriched
- openness is risked
- the lives of people is our only concern

Schmidt's NPR could not adhere to conventional reporter-mediated journalism, nor could it continue as traditional academically based educational radio. Schmidt called for programming based on the lives of real people, programming that allowed "ideas and experiences to be shared, considered, and modified." He proposed establishing a decentralized organization open to more than just officials, experts, and professionals in which individuals of all races, regions, and ideologies could have "direct broadcast involvement as people." "Only in this way," Schmidt said, "can a national service, a true *vox populi*, be established, and that, I submit, must be the cornerstone of program policy" (Schmidt).

Bill Siemering, another founding board member and manager of the radio station at the State University of New York at Buffalo, captured the ideas of Gwathmey, Schmidt, and other fellow board members in his written statement of purpose for National Public Radio. Siemering, who became NPR's first program director, did not outline a marketing plan for a radio service that identified specific content or target audiences. Instead, he painted a word picture of a good society in the context of what was happening in America in the '60s and '70s. He called for national unity based on diversity, mutual respect, understanding, tolerance, and rationality. His words were not radical. He did not call

for citizens to dismantle American society, as many students of the era did. Siemering simply called for a more humane, less contentious society and for the new public radio to play a central role in achieving it. He thought that public radio could enhance human understanding at both the rational and emotional levels:

National Public Radio . . . will regard the individual differences among men [*sic*] with respect and joy rather than derision and hate; it will celebrate the human experience as infinitely varied rather than vacuous and banal; it will encourage a sense of active constructive participation, rather than apathetic helplessness. . . .

The programs will enable the individual to better understand himself, his government, his institutions, and his national and social environment so he can intelligently participate in effecting the process of change. . . .

The total service should be trustworthy, enhance intellectual development, expand knowledge, deepen aural aesthetic enjoyment, increase the pleasure of living in a pluralistic society and result in a service to listeners which makes them more responsive, informed human beings and intelligent responsible citizens of their communities and the world. (Siemering, "National")

Siemering's statement of purposes summarized the philosophy behind the new public radio and provided the rationale for NPR's first major program, *All Things Considered (ATC)* (Siemering, "Implementation"). *ATC's* magazine program design was meant to cover the full range of experiences Siemering described in his statement of purposes. *ATC* was not a conventional news program. Traditional journalism was too authoritative, too confined to the workings of politics and government. *ATC* would discuss as much as report the issues of the day. *ATC* would as likely discuss an individual's spiritual experience as a congressman's proposed legislation and would as likely involve in the discussion those without expert credentials as those with them. As NPR's first program director, Siemering asked his staff, "Why do we assume that what the president did today is necessarily the most important story to tell? Maybe the fact that some unemployed person found a job today is more important" (Siemering, "National").

Siemering saw *ATC* as much more than a mere radio program. He saw it as epitomizing liberal humanistic values, as a means by which public radio could foster a good and humane society. In contrast to a commercial broadcaster trying to break into the highly fragmented and formatted radio world of the early '70s, Siemering did not design *ATC* to serve a niche market. Nor did he design it to serve a series of specific audiences, like the model the Carnegie Commission urged for public television. He designed it to meet what he saw as

a societal need. He saw *ATC* as a program fostering understanding among diverse individuals. Such a program needed diverse individuals to listen. *ATC*, therefore, could have no specific demographic target. However, Siemering did assume that thoughtful, tolerant individuals were more likely than bigoted and self-righteous ones to seek out such a program.

Some NPR staff members who participated in creating *All Things Considered* envisioned public radio becoming everyone's "second favorite" station. Commercial radio stations prospered in the crowded radio marketplace by specializing. They targeted a well-defined constituency and served it and only it. Everyone in America probably had a commercial station aimed right at him or her. He or she would select that station as a first choice. But when he or she wanted something a little different, something a little offbeat, something just outside his or her specific tastes and interests, he or she would tune to public radio. Individuals would occasionally turn away from their country, rock, classical, big-band, easy-listening, black, Hispanic, all-news, or all-talk station and meet at a station welcoming to all, public radio. Thus public radio practitioners saw their audience as more diverse than any commercial radio station's. They thought they might reach a higher total number of listeners over the course of a week or a month than any commercial station would. They saw public radio as the favorite station of no one, but the alternative choice of everyone.

Public Service in the Marketplace

Beautiful in theory, Siemering and his cohorts' vision for public radio was no more realistic in a competitive environment than Lord Reith's vision for public service radio. In reality, few people tuned to public radio as their second favorite station. Listeners in significant numbers did not leave their favorite commercial station to interact for an hour or two each week with diverse individuals unlike themselves on public radio. Public radio did attract some listeners from classical, rock, all-news, and all-talk stations, but many of them gradually redefined themselves as public radio listeners rather than classical, rock, news, or talk listeners. For them, public radio became their favorite station, not an alternative.

As public radio has evolved over the last thirty years, it has changed its focus from providing a polyglot vox populi to offering dependable, high-quality, intelligent news coverage. Populist egalitarianism has gradually given way to journalistic authority. The weekly audience for public radio has grown from about 2 million a week in its early days to over 20 million (Radio Research Cooperative 1999) On average, these listeners spend over an hour each day with public radio. Many now cite public radio as their primary radio station. While these listeners do include men and women, blacks and whites, Asians and Hispanics, young and old, wealthy and impoverished, they are not typical of the population as a whole. No matter how diverse, they do not represent a cross section of

America, merely a cross section of the most highly educated Americans. Nearly all listeners to public radio have attended college. More than half have earned graduate or professional degrees. Educational level predicts public radio listening better than any other characteristic. Even among the best-educated Americans, however, public radio appeals more to some groups than to others. It appeals more to those who are less materialistic and more societally conscious. Such listeners hardly constitute a cross section of America (Giovannoni, "Public Radio Listeners"; Thomas and Clifford, *Audience 88*).

Over its thirty-year history public radio has become more and more dependent on listeners for financial support. Especially during the '80s, public radio's prosperity came to rely on the loyalty and generosity of its listeners. Unlike a charity, which gets contributions from one group of people to aid another group that it serves in some way, public radio gets contributions from those it serves, from those who use and value its services most. In a sense, public radio's audience, an unrepresentative slice of America if ever there was one, enslaved it. To generate enough income to grow, if not to survive, public radio had to please its masters, its well-educated, societally conscious listeners (Thomas and Clifford, *Audience 88*). Public radio station managers learned about audience research, marketing, and sales. Some public radio practitioners began to describe their mission as a business. Whereas they used to base program decisions on somewhat nebulous standards of artistic, journalistic, or academic merit, they began to "think audience." They initiated a new standard for quality in programming: acceptance by public radio's "quality" audience. If the masters, public radio listeners, liked a program, it was deemed good. If they did not like a program, it was dumped (Giovannoni, "State"; National Public Radio, "Audience Building").

The practical consequences of this new concern for pleasing the audience were not as profound as one might think, however. Programming did not change very much when public radio practitioners began to "think audience." Public radio's listeners had come to it because they resonated with the programming that was already there. The last thing these listeners wanted was change. Indeed, they became an essentially conservative force within public radio, strongly advocating for public radio to stay true to its first values, values that had been formed by the universities that fostered educational radio and which were restated with an inclusive, democratic twist by Bill Siemering and the initial NPR board. Public radio most pleased its masters, its distinctive base of listeners, when it pursued most vigorously its public service values.

Public Service in the Megamarket

Today the already diverse and crowded radio marketplace is about to explode. New technologies will create a megamarketplace offering listeners far more

choices and broadcasters far more options for delivery methods and ways to generate income. This megamarketplace will vastly increase public radio's competition, but it will also increase the ways public radio can successfully meet that competition. Public radio must reexamine fundamental questions about its purpose, its role in the marketplace, and its funding. Three paths lead from the crossroads at which public radio now finds itself. The first path would lead public radio fully into the marketplace, where it might exploit its competitive strengths. The second path would lead it in the opposite direction, to reaffirm its role as the antidote to the highly segmented marketplace. The third path would lead public radio in the same direction it has followed uncomfortably but successfully for the past two decades, a path meandering between an antimarket mission and the reality of the media marketplace.

Following the first path fully into the marketplace is the most tempting.

Following the second path to reach the high ground above the marketplace is the most idealistic.

Following the third path that winds between the other two is the most pragmatic.

Into the Marketplace

To reiterate, public radio enjoys a number of strengths as a competitor in the media marketplace. It produces and owns unique content. It commands an unusual level of respect and loyalty from a demographically desirable audience. Multimedia online or satellite-based services under the NPR trademark should enjoy audience acceptance and financial success beyond those most competitors offer. Public radio listeners readily adopt new technologies and have the financial means to pay for services. Many listeners already pay for public radio with voluntary contributions. Public radio could squeeze income from all its listeners if it became a subscription or pay-per-play service. Commercial advertising is another possibility. Advertisers would happily pay to reach public radio's bright, affluent listeners. Public radio might sell books, records, travel, and other services directly to its audience through e-commerce. Once new technologies free public radio from the strict limitations imposed by its noncommercial broadcast licenses, it would have the same freedom any other entrepreneur has to generate income by any means available. The temptation to commercially exploit public radio's audience is real. Minnesota Public Radio and its executives made a fortune by selling the catalogue business that grew out of *A Prairie Home Companion* to a retail chain for over \$100 million (Kahn, Minnesota Public Radio).

If an old-fashioned catalogue could generate \$100 million, using the new technologies for a subscription service and moving into e-commerce could generate untold amounts. This potential for funding is the silver lining of some very large and very dark clouds, however. Public radio lacks the capital to implement

the new technologies on a scale large enough to achieve viability. It could find that capital, but at a very high price: compromising its purpose. Rational people or organizations willing to “invest” in such an enterprise will expect a return. For-profit companies eager to establish partnerships with public radio do so for profit. Even though such potential investors and partners recognize that public radio’s value derives from its not-for-profit, public service philosophy, they themselves value the bottom line. With investors and partners who value the bottom line, public radio would have to value it too. Public radio would become a niche service marketed to a select audience just like any of its commercial competitors. Noncommercial public radio would no longer be noncommercial or public. It would lose any claim on public resources. Of course, following the path into the marketplace could prove so economically successful that public radio would no longer need to claim public resources. Of the three paths public radio could follow, this is the one that is the most tempting—but it will also lead to the end of public radio.

Above the Marketplace

The new technologies soon will allow anyone to have whatever she or he wants whenever she or he wants it. Public service radio could wend its way through this new competitive maze on a path that takes the high ground above the marketplace. It can look back for its direction to Lord Reith’s vision for the BBC and introduce listeners, who can have whatever they want whenever they want it, to what they do not know they want. No commercial broadcaster has any motivation to take on this educational responsibility. Only a broadcaster focused on public service would acknowledge the responsibility and assume it.

The new technologies will slice audiences into ever smaller segments. This segmentation threatens the cohesion of American society; by taking to the high ground above the marketplace, public service radio can attempt to counter it. Public radio can stay committed to the founding purposes of National Public Radio: to provide a common meeting ground, welcome diverse voices, and listen respectfully to many points of view. In 1970 Joe Gwathmey saw public radio breaking down barriers among people. Karl Schmidt saw it as a *vox populi* allowing people to learn from one another. Bill Siemering saw it celebrating the human experience as infinitely diverse. Like Reith, NPR’s founders sought to broaden perspectives and widen horizons. Neither Siemering nor Reith proposed to give the public only what it already wanted, already believed, already understood. Each would surprise listeners with ideas and people they would not have sought out on their own. The very title of NPR’s first major program, *All Things Considered*, suggests public radio as the antiniche service. In an ultra-segmented world of broadcast niches, public radio could take the high road and promote unity.

In the past, however, high-minded efforts to promote unity and educate listeners have failed in practice. The BBC eventually had to succumb to the public's demands to hear what it wanted, not what Reith wanted them to hear. The BBC began to justify its programs as giving everyone something that he or she really wanted to hear instead of giving everyone something he or she did not want to hear. In the United States, public radio never attracted an audience anywhere near as diverse as NPR's founding purposes hoped. Public radio sincerely welcomed all, but those who chose to listen represented such a narrow type that "NPR listener" became a meaningful term.

Public radio has a distinctive and loyal audience because it does not try to provide "something for everyone," as its democratic philosophy suggests it should. If public broadcasting follows this above-the-market path and neglects the preferences of its actual listeners, contributions and underwriting income will likely fall as listenership falls. Public radio would have to depend primarily on government subsidies or endowments for funding. State government generosity to public broadcasting through the years has exceeded the federal government's, but both bodies would need to increase their subsidies if public radio totally surmounted the marketplace. Such an increase in state and federal subsidies is highly unlikely. If public radio had fewer listeners loyal enough to pressure their governments to support the services they used, the likelihood of increased subsidies would disappear completely. Whether funded through marketplace mechanisms or through the government, ultimately public radio cannot survive without a reasonably large and loyal audience.

Stay the Course

The final path skirts the edges of the marketplace but does not rise above it. It's the general direction in which public radio has traveled for the past twenty years. Since many forces are pulling public radio toward the marketplace and virtually none are pointing to the high ground above it, this middle course is the conservative alternative to the marketplace path. Continuing to go in this direction means:

1. Public radio should remain not-for-profit and reject partnerships with or financing from for-profit entities.
2. Public radio should participate in the Internet, satellite, and other new technologies but in a limited way. Public radio needs to use these new technologies while rejecting the gold-rush mentality of the e-world. Public radio should hold a place in the new technologies similar to its place on the broadcast radio dial, a not-for-profit spot surrounded by commercialism. It will not be the Net's largest nor most financially successful player, just as it is not broadcast

- radio's largest nor most financially successful player. It will, however, be a player.
3. While recognizing that not everyone will actually listen to its programs, public radio should provide its programs to everyone without discrimination and without cost. It can require no subscription fees or payments for programming that are not strictly voluntary. It should continue to resemble the public library and avoid the temptation to emulate a chain bookstore.
 4. Public radio organizations should retain, in all their operations in both old and new technologies, the spirit, if not the literal reality, of NPR's original purposes. Their programming should represent a diversity of voices expressing a range of views, including voices and views other media ignore, voices and views perhaps no one wants to hear. Public radio should have no illusion that the composition of its audience will match the scope of its programming, however.
 5. Similarly, public radio organizations should hang on to Reithian and educational radio traditions by presenting material that surprises, broadens, or deepens understanding. At least from time to time, listeners should expect to hear things they would not expect to hear.

These five signposts for the middle road between the marketplace and the high ground proclaim public radio's value as a positive, conciliatory, and educational force in communities and the nation. As such, public radio retains a legitimate claim on public support from governments, universities, and certain large foundations.

Those same signposts also point the way to attracting and pleasing a certain type of listener, those whose own value systems similarly reject profit as supremely important, respect independence and quality over bigness, revel in new ideas, and appreciate a diversity of peoples. These listeners prize information or entertainment that surprises, challenges, deepens, or broadens, that educates not in the formal sense but continuously throughout their listening lives.

In all probability, public radio will continue to appeal primarily to the highly educated, most particularly to the highly educated who are more concerned with societal than individual needs and more driven by value than by consumption. Public radio may squirm at the reality that it serves this niche audience, an audience as specialized as for any commercial provider, but it is the reality. Public radio is most likely to retain these listeners and attract more like them, even against commercial competition, if it stays true to its public service mission.

A subtle but decisive attraction for listeners is public radio's nonexploitive atmosphere. Public radio's listeners are pleased that it does not regard them as

a “target” audience (Lauer, Lalley, and Associates; Siemering, “Some Things”). They are proud that public radio’s programming attracted them but was not consciously shaped to attract them. They appreciate programming presented because some thoughtful person found it interesting, important, or entertaining rather than because it is calculated to sell them something. This difference is too subtle for most people even to recognize, but for those who do, those most loyal to public radio, these subtleties give public broadcasting a decisive advantage. There is nothing commercial, for-profit broadcasters can do to surmount that advantage among those who sense it. Public radio could jeopardize its own advantage, however, by speeding down the path into the megamarketplace.

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CHAPTER 20**RADIO BY AND FOR THE PUBLIC****The Death and Resurrection of Low-Power Radio**

Paul Riismandel

ON 20 JANUARY 2000 THE Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released a Report and Order creating a new low-power FM radio service (LPFM). The FCC's stated purpose for licensing stations operating at power levels dwarfed by most existing stations—10 to 100 watts, as opposed to full-power stations at 100 to 100,000 watts—is to create a class of radio stations designed to serve very localized communities or underrepresented groups within communities" (US, FCC, Report and Order 4). These low-power stations are able to serve this purpose because they cost less to construct and operate, and because their small coverage area is well suited to focusing on a neighborhood or other geographically limited area. Using the lowest power levels that will be licensed, stations can be put in dense urban areas where crowding on the radio dial prevents constructing additional high-power stations (5–7).

Considered by itself, low-power radio seems like a good idea, if hardly one to arouse much furor. New classes of telecommunications are created not infrequently, and modifications to existing broadcast rules can happen several times a year. Thus, typical broadcast rule-making procedures undertaken by the FCC rarely merit much notice by anyone except broadcasters, the telecommunications business, and a few academics and analysts—primarily those most directly affected.

Instead, LPFM has developed into an explosively controversial topic, making for unusual and embittered enemies, not to mention odd bedfellows. On one side are the low-power radio advocates and activists—from the United

Church of Christ (UCC) to electronics dealer and unlicensed broadcaster Doug Brewer, also known as the "Party Pirate." On the other side are those opposed, such as the Walt Disney Corporation and National Public Radio (NPR). It might seem odd that in the era of the Internet anything regarding the oldest of broadcast media would arouse the type of passion that this seemingly innocuous technology has in the last few years. But what LPFM has come to represent is a battle over the very nature of US broadcasting, the likes of which have barely been seen since the late 1920s and early 1930s, when, as McChesney documents, the seeds of the American commercial broadcasting system were just being sown.

The crucial difference between the 1930s and now is the stakes. Prior to 1934 and the passage of the Communications Act, the legal status of network-dominated commercial broadcasting was not yet assured, although it was clearly economically viable and dominant. During the period in which Congress worked on the Communications Act, broadcast reformers mounted what McChesney calls "an assault on the status quo that revealed surprising ferocity" (*Telecommunications* 188–89). Their objective was to challenge the supremacy of commercial broadcasting in the United States before it was too late.

Unfortunately, those reformers were not particularly successful in the final outcome of the act. Now, nearly seventy years later, it is all too clear that consolidated commercial broadcasting has become utterly predominant in the United States. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 furthered this by significantly loosening ownership restriction on broadcast stations, removing all limits on the number of stations a given company can own nationally, and raising from four to eight the maximum number of stations that a company can own in a given market. The 1996 act thus touched off an onslaught of massive consolidation within the broadcast industry. Within only a year of the passage of the act huge radio oligopolies were created, such as when Clear Channel Communications expanded its ownership to 100 radio stations and CBS/Westinghouse bought Infinity Communications to form a network of 77 radio stations (Hickey). Just a few years later CBS/Infinity now alone owns 165 radio stations, including six of the ten highest-grossing ones nationwide ("Planet Viacom").

Such overwhelming consolidation results in centralized operation and management of stations, such that major programming decisions are made by national offices rather than locally. Unfortunately, the situation is not dissimilar in public radio. Most public stations are affiliated with and heavily programmed by NPR, even if not centrally owned by it, and NPR itself increasingly acts like a commercial broadcaster. The end result for listeners and communities is that radio stations fail to reflect their local communities very well, giving especially short shrift to local news and issues programming, if they do news or issues programming at all.

Before the FCC even considered LPFM, micropower radio activist Lee Ballinger told the International Micropower Broadcasting Conference that

although the Telecommunications Act had sparked massive consolidation, “there is at least one good thing about this truly frightening piece of legislation: it puts the opportunities and dangers that face the microbroadcasting movement in sharp focus” (25). In fact, in her separate statement on the creation of LPFM, FCC commissioner Gloria Tristani makes explicit that LPFM is a direct reaction to the massive consolidation caused by the Telecommunications Act:

Since the 1996 Telecommunications Act was passed, the number of radio station owners has decreased about 12%. . . . [A]s distant owners, national play lists and syndicated programming become more and more prevalent. . . . I’ve grown increasingly concerned about the effect of consolidation on localism and the diversity of voices on the public airwaves. The new low power radio service we are adopting is a partial antidote to the negative effects of consolidation.

So while there are still activists who entertain thoughts of turning the tide, the prospects of wholesale reform in the near term do not appear promising at all. This is why the prospect of LPFM arouses such passion. However small it may seem, the FCC’s LPFM plan promises to create, for the first time in over twenty years, a broadcast service that is both specifically oriented toward locally based, nonprofit interests and compatible with existing broadcast services. No new radios or equipment are necessary to receive LPFM; quite simply, it creates the opportunity for broadcast stations where there previously were none.

Why LPFM? Why Now?

It is crucial to recognize that the FCC did not unilaterally identify and address the need for low-power community radio stations. Indeed, the FCC itself—along with Congress—bears principal responsibility for the conditions creating this need. Thus, instead of being proactive, it is clear that the FCC was reacting to a groundswell of support for the idea. Prior to launching its LPFM initiative, the FCC’s Audio Division acknowledged on its Web site that it had received “many thousands of inquiries (well over 30,000 last year!) from individuals and groups wishing to start a ‘low power’ or ‘micro power’ radio station for local broadcasts.”

What is probably a greater reason for the FCC’s interest in LPFM is the explosion of unlicensed or so-called pirate broadcasters. For these broadcasters the commission’s twenty-two-year-old policy of not licensing radio stations operating at under 100 watts of power has been a unifying *raison d’être*. In fact, if one wants to broadcast to a small geographic area with very minimal power, there is no choice but to do so without a license, because there has been no chance that one would be granted.

Perhaps the most prominent microbroadcaster—a name unlicensed low-power broadcasters prefer over *pirate*—is Stephen Dunifer, who operated unli-

censed Free Radio Berkeley (FRB) from April 1993 until June 1998.¹ Beginning with a portable transmitter and broadcasting from the hills overlooking Berkeley, California, FRB met up with the FCC the year it started and was issued a \$20,000 fine for operating its 40-watt radio station without a license. Dunifer, backed by the National Lawyer's Guild, went on to challenge the fine, as well as the constitutionality of the FCC's ban on low-power stations (Lew; Curtius). The station achieved a partial victory in November 1997, when Ninth Circuit Court judge Claudia Wilken refused to grant an FCC-requested preliminary injunction against Dunifer and FRB, allowing the station to remain on the air pending a hearing in court (Lew). The respite lasted for only about seven months, until Judge Wilken ordered Dunifer and FRB off the air, ruling that their challenge to the constitutionality of the FCC's regulation was invalid because Dunifer had never applied for a license to broadcast and therefore had never been denied one (Burruss, "FCC Wins"). Dunifer and FRB complied with the order, but protest broadcasts put on by FRB supporters continued, including a station calling itself Tree Radio Berkeley, which in December 1998 broadcast from fifty feet above the ground in a redwood tree in a park in Berkeley for several days and nights (Burruss, "Broadcasts").

Although he is arguably the most visible and vocal microbroadcaster, Dunifer is far from alone. In fact, he was first inspired to take to the airwaves by Mbanna Kantako, who in 1986 first broadcast to the John Hay Homes housing project in Springfield, Illinois, with just 1 watt of power (Sakolsky). Overall, Dunifer estimates that around a thousand micropower stations are on the air in the United States and claims that he and FRB have themselves sold about three hundred microbroadcasting transmitter kits (Cornwell). Dunifer's estimate doesn't seem unrealistic, given that between August 1997 and November 1999 the FCC is reported to have shut down five hundred unlicensed radio stations (Shiver)—half the number he claims are on the air. In fact, the number of microbroadcasters may be growing, since in many cases the closing of one station results in at least one more going on the air, as was the case with FRB and Tree Radio Berkeley. Further attesting to their numbers, in the spring of 1998 about one thousand microbroadcasters attended two conferences held in Philadelphia and Las Vegas, the latter purposely coinciding with the annual National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) convention (Duncan).

Many avoid the spotlight, but the appearances of unlicensed microbroadcasters of all stripes are reported nonetheless in the local papers of cities such as Cleveland, Ohio, home to GRID radio, which programs to the gay community (Feran), and New Haven, Connecticut, where La Nueva Radio Musical broadcasts to the area's Latinos (Tuhus). Clearly, microbroadcasters are an exceedingly diverse lot, representing a broad range of cultures, ideas, and viewpoints and not necessarily agreeing on much aside from the right to broadcast. A representative from Iowa City Free Radio attending a microbroadcasting confer-

ence drove the latter point home: “I didn’t appreciate the assumptions that ‘we’re all here to promote revolution’ or to ‘fuck the FCC’” (qtd. in Duncan). Yet what unites these microbroadcasters is the systematic exclusion of them and their audiences—who frequently are also participants—from their local media, be it commercial or public, radio or television.

It is this very aspect of participation that most meaningfully separates microbroadcasters from most licensed broadcasters, and what makes them seem so threatening to the licensed. One only has to listen across the radio dial for an hour or so to realize that there is a dearth of unprofessional voices on the air. And, rather disturbingly, listening to the radio in cities as diverse as New York, Atlanta, Oklahoma City, and even Champaign, Illinois, reveals a near total lack of regional accents and dialects too. Everyone speaks the same way, because they were all trained to speak that way. If an unprofessional voice does make it onto the air, it’s usually because that person is an interview subject or a caller to a talk show, who may be cut off or taken off the air at the host’s whim.

The Real Problem

The lack of variability in voice, accent, and dialect is really just a symptom of the overwhelming homogeneity and lack of diversity in American radio broadcasting. This lack of diversity is certainly manifest as a lack of cultural diversity, but this too finds its root in the overall lack of public interaction and control in radio broadcasting. Commercial broadcasters simply have no interest in allowing the general public onto their stations except under the most constrained of circumstances, such as in talk radio.

For any person, group, organization, or community that has something to express on the radio—especially something that won’t fit into a thirty-second sound bite—these circumstances present a pretty grim prospect of that happening. Unfortunately, public radio stations—which make up a small minority of radio stations—present no greater an opportunity either. As Soley observes,

Only 15 percent of AM and FM radio stations are noncommercial, and most of these are affiliated with NPR, which has effectively kept the public from participating in program production. In effect, NPR has functioned as a government-funded barrier to real community broadcasting. (46)

Stephen Dunifer cites the failure of public radio and even Berkeley’s community radio station KPFA—the founding and flagship station of the progressive Pacifica network—to provide an open, accessible gateway for actively using the airwaves as a strong motivation for starting FRB (Dunifer). Napoleon Williams had a similar motivation for creating Black Liberation Radio, which he operated from the early 1990s until 1998 in Decatur, Illinois, a city that lacks both com-

munity and public radio stations. Williams characterizes the Decatur radio dial as “just homogenized all-sound-alike radio stations all directed at white males between the age of thirty-five and fifty” (Dunifer, Denney, and Hall 112) and says that if there were a community radio station in Decatur that offered open access to anyone in the community, as there is in the neighboring city of Champaign, then he might not have needed to violate the FCC’s rules by putting Black Liberation Radio on the air (Williams).

This exclusion is what has propelled unlicensed microbroadcasters to take to the air; surprisingly enough, it is a rationale that the FCC cites for embarking on its plan to license LPFM, and it has even been integrated into the rules for LPFM. According to the FCC’s Report and Order, commercial interests are specifically and unequivocally excepted from LPFM (17). Further, the FCC also privileges and gives the first opportunity for stations to local organizations that do not already have stations in their community; only these organizations are eligible for LPFM licenses during the first two years of the service. In the third year of service LPFM licenses will be available to nonlocal licensees, allowing any given licensee to have a maximum of five licenses nationally, with an absolute maximum of ten licenses nationally after the fourth year of the LPFM service (37–41), although the commission still “will grant a significant selection preference to locally-based applicants” (1). Within any given community the FCC limits the ownership of multiple LPFM stations such that

no entity [may] own or have an attributable interest in two or more LPFM stations located within 7 miles of each other. That is, to comply with our local ownership limits, the antennas of commonly-owned stations must be separated by at least seven miles. We believe seven miles is appropriate given the approximately 3.5 mile signal reach of LP100 stations. (44)

These ownership limits are more stringent than those in effect for full-power stations and, significantly, greatly limit the ability to create large regional or national networks like that owned by CBS/Infinity. Effectively, this should keep LPFM outside the influence of the largest members of the NAB, both commercial and noncommercial.

NPR, the largest public radio network in the United States, has formally opposed the creation of the LPFM service established by the FCC. While not dismissing the idea of low-powered stations—calling this notion of “empowering churches, schools and other community based organizations” a “laudable vision” (29)—NPR joins the NAB in the firmly held position that the relaxation of technical standards that makes LPFM possible will cause intolerable interference with existing high-power stations (Conciatore). In its comments to the FCC, NPR makes it clear that LPFM stations are viewed not as additions to the existing public radio system but rather as competitors: “public radio is an inval-

able community resource, and it must not be sacrificed as a result of the Commission's desire to establish new, low power FM broadcast stations" (8).

Not a New Idea: The History of LPFM

While the FCC's recent interest in LPFM may be new, the idea and the arguments against it are not, because about a quarter century ago, LPFM was indeed an active and legal broadcast service in the United States. Then the public radio establishment of NPR and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPR) were not only strong opponents of LPFM but actually instrumental in the push to have LPFM discontinued.

The FCC first began licensing class D low-power (10 watts or less) FM radio stations to educational institutions in 1948.² Compared to those with higher power, these stations were relatively easy and inexpensive to operate, benefiting from inexpensive equipment and relaxed technical standards. The FCC hoped that creating the 10-watt educational service would encourage educational institutions to establish stations on the largely vacant educational FM band.

The FCC created the noncommercial educational FM band in 1938 in order to comply with section 307(c) of the Communications Act of 1934, which required it to allocate a percentage of radio frequencies for noncommercial purposes (Creech 32–37). By 1946 there were only 9 educational FM stations on the air, compared to 26 commercial stations (43). The number of educational stations was up to 29 in 1948, when the FCC began licensing 10-watt stations (Carmode), which spurred an increase of 58 new noncommercial stations in 1949 alone. Ten-watt stations continued to experience growth into the 1950s, while commercial FM stations actually declined: by 1956 there were a total of 125 noncommercial FM stations on the air, whereas between 1949 and 1956 the FCC granted 245 commercial FM licenses but deleted 722 (Creech 43–46).

By April 1967 134 of the 311 educational stations on the air in the noncommercial band were class D 10-watt stations (Land Associates I-2). Commercial FM broadcasting was not close to being considered a success, but it is clear that the FCC was successful in stimulating the use of the noncommercial end of the FM dial via the 10-watt station.³ This success did not escape the notice of high-power educational broadcasters, which began to pressure the FCC to enforce a more rigid order on the educational band. As a result, the FCC issued a rule-making proposal, Docket 14185, recommending that, due to increased crowding in the noncommercial FM band, all noncommercial FM stations should be subject to the same technical regulations as commercial stations. This included creating a nationally standardized table of allocations for the noncommercial band in addition to requiring low-power stations to upgrade their power to the Class A minimum power level of 100 watts—the lowest power class for commercial stations—or go off the air. The call for a noncommercial band

table of allocation was echoed in a report released by the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB), the primary organization representing educational and noncommercial radio stations at the time. This April 1967 report, entitled *The Hidden Medium: A Status Report on Educational Radio in the United States*, also made a strong recommendation for the funding of noncommercial radio (I-16–17).

The date for final comments on Docket 14185 was 11 May 1967, but instead this docket remained open without action by the commission until 17 March 1976, when the FCC closed it and released the Proposed Assignment and Operation for a new docket, Docket 20735, in response to a petition for rule making submitted by the nine-year-old CPB (Creech 2–4), which had been incorporated by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. This petition, submitted on 12 May 1972, proposed a series of changes in the rules for the assignment and operation of noncommercial FM stations (*Federal Register*, 23 Apr. 16973), including requests for a table of allocations for the noncommercial band and for the FCC to cease licensing low-power stations. In addition, the CPB proposed that

[existing] 10-watt operations would not stand on the same footing as would those with greater facilities . . . they would not be protected from interference except that which would be caused by another 10-watt station. Moreover, any Class D station would be required to change channel [frequency] to accommodate a more powerful station even if the latter were proposed long after the Class D station went on the air. [The Class D station] would have to leave the air entirely if a channel could not be found. (16975)

In the view of the CPB 10-watt stations were “severely limited in the number of listeners they can serve and frequently preclude higher powered stations from serving these areas” (CPB 1). Further, the CPB argued that many 10-watt stations were used “solely or primarily . . . as training facilities for students” and that “frequently these stations offer[ed] little or no commercial educational programming” (qtd. in Carmode). The CPB saw the sharp increase in the number of 10-watt stations as threatening to exhaust available frequencies, preventing high-power “full-service” stations from getting on the air. Therefore the CPB expressed the hope that adoption of their proposed rules would “enhance prospects for the growth and development of full-service public radio stations” (CPB 1).

In response to the CPB’s proposal the FCC received forty-two formal and informal response filings, sixteen of which supported the CPB’s petition “without reservation.” Five filings supported the CPB’s stated goals for managing the noncommercial band but opposed its proposal to eliminate 10-watt stations, while three filings opposed the CPB’s petition entirely (*Federal Register*, 23 Apr. 16973). As Creech notes, comments filed by broadcasters and broadcast inter-

ests on behalf of Docket 20735 “illustrated the deep divisions” that existed among noncommercial and educational interests with respect to 10-watt stations. National Public Radio (NPR) and the Association of Public Radio Stations generally sided with the CPB’s proposals, while the NAEB warned against precluding the development of 10-watt stations, although it recommended a “gradual” increase in power. Responses from 10-watt licensees were generally against the proposed restrictions on 10-watt stations, with one low-power broadcaster characterizing the proposal as “a literal power grab” (62–63).

In its 1976 announcement of Docket 20735 the FCC noted several rationales to support 10-watt stations against the CPB’s proposal. One rationale was that low-cost 10-watt stations served as entry-level stations, which could be upgraded to higher power as “public acceptance” of the stations grew (*Federal Register*, 23 Apr. 1975). The FCC’s own records indicated that 40% of stations that began at 10 watts had sought or obtained high-power transmitters, and many that had not increased power were prevented from doing so by engineering considerations. This led the FCC to question whether adoption of the CPB proposal would “end this chance to begin at 10 watts on the way to establishing these stations with adequate funding to extend their coverage” (1976).

Another, more radical viewpoint—echoing the argument of contemporary microbroadcasters and, strangely enough, the current FCC—held that 10-watt stations served their communities best at that power level:

According to this view, operation on a greater scale with substantial facilities would bring about a separation of the station from community and thereby cause a loss of effective station/community dialogue and involvement. (1975)

In the summary of its 1976 rule-making proposal for Docket 20735 the FCC (ironically, given the eventual outcome of this petition) appeared to support the continuance of 10-watt station licensure quite clearly:

We are not now proposing the end of all 10-watt or other lower power operations. Some truly fit in the open spaces that would not accommodate more powerful stations. . . . [I]t could be argued that abolishing these 10-watt operations would be like banishing the oil from a sardine can because of an alleged lack of space. (1978)

Sensing the FCC’s apparent desire to protect the 10-watt stations, Gibson remarked in 1977 that

the FCC had so carefully and faithfully nurtured the 10-watt stations that there was little danger that the regulatory agency would take action which would destroy its offspring. (223)

Yet this would prove to belie the actual outcome of the FCC’s inquiry.

Over two years later, on 1 September 1978, the FCC released its Second Report and Order on Docket 20735. In a decision largely consistent with the CPB's proposal, the FCC decided to cease licensing Class D 10-watt stations. Existing 10-watt stations would have the option to increase power to the Class A minimum of 100 watts, move to a frequency in the commercial band in order to clear space in the noncommercial band, or move to a new channel, 87.9 MHz., that was added to the FM broadcast band but available only in limited areas.⁴ Those stations choosing to remain at 10 watts would lose protection from interference by higher-power stations and be treated like FM translators (*Federal Register*, 6 Sept. 1978 39708, 39712; "FCC Moves").⁵

The Cause of Death: Centralization

In his policy analysis of this action Creech finds that the CPB's policy goals were clearly stated—"the Corporation set out to establish a quality high-powered non-commercial radio service in the U.S." On the other hand, the FCC "fell back to a defense of the original goal for the low-power service, that of providing a useful basis for higher powered stations." Thus he characterizes the CPB as "[chastising] the Commission for allowing 10-watt stations to grow in a haphazard manner" while questioning the FCC's contention that 10-watt stations were stepping-stones to higher-powered stations. Creech believes this prompted the FCC to delay prompt action "in order to save face" and to finally side with "higher powered interests" (63-64).

More accurately, the FCC should be said to have yielded to higher-powered interests that were also more organized and centralized. Only one small organization representing the interests of student-run college stations—the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System (IBS)—and several 10-watt stations filed petitions against the CPB's proposal. The IBS asserted that, in effect, the CPB's proposal was intended to quiet student-run stations by forcing them off the air (Carmode). In response to such criticisms the CPB claimed that it did not want to eliminate these stations. Rather, the CPB saw that noncommercial band congestion necessitated comparison of the relative worth of station types and that a choice needed to be made when the interests of 10-watt and higher-powered stations were at odds. The CPB obviously placed greater worth on high-powered stations. The 10-watt stations also contended that the CPB's proposal was self-serving, given the fact that its funding guidelines excluded all 10-watt stations. The CPB's response was that its mandate was not to serve all noncommercial stations, but to make noncommercial broadcasts available to all citizens (*Federal Register*, 6 Sept. 39706).

Surprisingly, the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB), an advocate of grassroots noncommercial radio, also weighed in soundly against 10-watt stations. In its filings with the FCC, the NFCB reported studies in which it found that without existing 10-watt stations forty to forty-five additional high-

power stations could be established in the top one hundred radio markets. Interestingly, the NFCB also found that many of these new high-power stations were blocked by Class A stations operating at close to the lowest permissible power of 100 watts. Further, the NFCB strongly contested the FCC's earlier belief that 10-watt stations could serve as stepping-stones to higher-power operations, noting that it could cost as little as \$1,500 more (in 1978) to build a higher-power Class A station. Supporting its preference for high-power stations, the NFCB contended that they would also be easier to support than 10-watt stations as a result of having a larger audience of potential contributors (39707).

Here it is obvious that the 10-watt stations' accusation that the CPB was acting self-servingly with its proposal is also relevant for the NFCB's support of the CPB's proposal. That the relatively centralized and federally funded interest of the CPB should be attractive to a supposedly grassroots organization representing generally independent community stations is almost counterintuitive. Due to the fact that during the mid-1970s many noncommercial radio stations did not qualify for most forms of CPB funding, Routt and colleagues observe, there was "a schism among educational stations," which were primarily owned and operated by universities and usually received CPB funding, "and community/alternative stations," which received CPB funding less universally. They cite a strong response to the CPB's 10-watt proposal published in the *Alternative Radio Exchange*.

The CPB proposal represents the classic conflict between the well-funded, expensive, heavily bureaucratized, heavily narcotized institutions—and the rowdy, slightly seedy, mostly poverty-stricken non-institutional community stations and of course—given past history, the giant college school departments of "communications" will win out—both in money and influence. (Qtd. in Routt, McGrath, and Weiss 277–78)

While this prediction of the outcome was accurate, its characterization of the conflict at hand was not quite so. As shown by the NFCB's support of the CPB with regard to 10-watt stations, the "poverty-stricken non-institutional community stations," as represented by the NFCB, were not in conflict with the educational giants. In fact, the lines of battle were drawn within academia itself. At the time the FCC released its rule making on Docket 20735 the vast majority of 10-watt stations were licensed to educational institutions, including colleges and universities as well as high schools. Only 2% were licensed to community organizations (Creech 68–69). Most community stations actually were high-power stations of at least 100 watts and thus were unaffected by the CPB's proposal. While the fact that most community stations were not affected by the CPB's proposal may explain why the NFCB might be agnostic with regard to it, the NFCB's adamant support—especially of the 10-watt provisions—begs for deeper analysis.

The answer lies in the simple fact that, in a fundamental way, the CPB controlled (and still controls) the purse strings of a good number of the NFCB's constituent stations. During the 1970s the CPB provided many large stations with grants equaling 15–40% of station budgets, while other NFCB member stations were looking to receive such funding. Most important was the CPB's role in funding the construction of new community stations through its Educational Broadcasting Facilities Program (EBFP) grants. These grants provided matching funds of up to \$3 from the CPB for every \$1 raised locally for the construction of a new station. To qualify for a grant an organization had to meet FCC requirements as a noncommercial broadcaster and to meet CPB funding requirements once the station was completed. Requiring qualified stations to broadcast at 250 watts or more, CPB requirements of course entirely excepted 10-watt stations, as NFCB president-to-be Tom Thomas plainly remarked in 1975:

If you have no hope of ever taking your power above 10 watts, if you are planning a campus radio station, or if you expect to broadcast only part of the day for years to come, the HEW and CPB programs are not for you. (Thomas 265–66)

EBFP grants were valuable not just for the money they provided but also because they set down a standard for noncommercial broadcasters recognized on a broad level, such that on average every \$1 of EBFP money in turn stimulated more than \$11 in state, local, and private money for sponsored stations (Blakely 199–200).

Given the potential cash windfall resulting from obtaining EBFP grants and qualifying for CPB support, it is easier to understand why the CPB's proposal would be attractive to the NFCB. If CPB funding were not available, 10-watt stations certainly would be an easier and less expensive path to establishing non-commercial community stations, especially given the fact that licensing procedures were much simpler than those for high-power stations. In general the application processes required for high-power FM licenses were—and continue to be—long, complex, and drawn out, sometimes taking as long as five to ten years.⁶ But with the aid of federal funds in constructing a station, along with the promise of continued federal funding for the operation of the station, it is again easy to understand why the NFCB would consider the CPB-funded high-power stations the preferred—if more bureaucratically complex—option.

Thus, rather than a conflict between “the rowdy, slightly seedy, mostly poverty-stricken non-institutional community stations” and high-power CPB-funded university stations, in actuality there was a conflict between the CPB, its funded stations, those pining for CPB funding—including the very federation of those “slightly seedy” community stations—and the mostly educational-institution-owned and student-operated 10-watt stations. And while it might have been tempting to view the 10-watt rule making as the triumph of the federally spon-

sored voices of liberal centrism over the left-wing voices of dissent, the facts simply do not bear out such a characterization.

Instead this conflict is better characterized as one of organization vs. disorganization or, more accurately, centralization (and consolidation of control) vs. decentralization. On the side of centralization certainly lies the CPB. In 1972, when the CPB first submitted its petition for rule making to the FCC, the United States's first federally funded public radio network, NPR, had been operating for about a year, and the CPB had begun a campaign at the FCC and in Congress to secure a national public radio satellite interconnect. Further, although the CPB and NPR were managed by only nominally democratic structures, Engelman observes that

a small group of insiders seemed to have multiple appointments on all the key deliberative bodies of the NAEB, the CPB and NPR . . . [and] no structure for regular communication between the NPR board and the stations had been established. (93)

In 1977 NPR established even greater consolidation of control in public radio when it merged with the Association of Public Radio Stations, which in 1973 took over most of the congressional lobbying and public relations for noncommercial radio from the NAEB. Although the intent of this merger was to create a single powerful organization to represent public radio, the effect of the merger was to collapse “the responsibilities of the two public radio organizations for programming, representation, distribution, station relations, promotion and research into a single national membership organization for radio” (100).

Also falling on the side of centralization—although not in the same way or nearly to the extent of the CPB and NPR—is the NFCB. In fact, the NFCB is seen better as having been in cahoots with the centralizing forces rather than being itself an advocate of centralization. In the mid-1970s stations represented by the NFCB along with future community stations stood to gain much financially and lose little by aligning themselves with the CPB. Although the creation of NPR caused the consolidation of control over much of public radio, at that time most NFCB stations were not NPR members and were thus generally free of this type of control.⁷ There were rumors among college broadcasters at the time that—in addition to offering a financial incentive—the CPB was exerting “heavy pressure” on the NFCB to cooperate with its proposal (Josephson, qtd. in Walker). Whether or not this was true (although it is certainly conceivable), the NFCB management did believe that 10-watt stations were standing in the way of establishing larger community stations. According to the then-president of the NFCB, Tom Thomas, even though many in community radio feared the loss of access that 10-watt stations provided,

groups that were trying to get on the air were finding themselves blocked, right, left, and center, by large number of high school sta-

tions, community college stations, and so forth that were basically just being run as adjuncts to school radio clubs and things of that sort but who just wouldn't budge. (Qtd. in Walker)

According to its by-laws, the NFCB is open to noncommercial stations governed by their community and committed to providing local access ("Mission Statement"); therefore it is unlikely that the NFCB management had consolidation and centralization as a goal, even if they were in bed with the forces that supported it.

Slicing a Small Pie

By the mid-1980s NFCB membership had grown to 70 members and 120 associates, but growth was slowing. Barlow suggests that during this time the NFCB and NPR "came to something of a 'gentlemen's agreement' with respect to the demarcations in the public radio domain," where NPR represented large CPB-funded stations and the NFCB represented the smaller, mostly nonfunded stations (qtd. in Engelman 68). What results from this state of affairs is essentially a duopoly of power in noncommercial radio—albeit where one player (NPR) has significantly more economic power and influence than the other (the NFCB).

After the FCC established the demise of 10-watt stations in Docket 20735, many believed that there would be a relatively quick reduction in the number of 10-watt stations, with many upgrading to high power to avoid being moved to a new location on the dial or being forced off the air by a high-power station. In fact, a study completed just before the FCC made its decision on Docket 20735 indicated fewer than half of 10-watt stations placed any priority on upgrading power (Creech 128), but by the end of the decade another study indicated that three-quarters of 10-watt stations intended to upgrade power (Wahl). In the end approximately 280 10-watt stations filed for power increases before the 1 January 1980 deadline imposed by the FCC. By 1995 the number of 10-watt stations on the air had fallen to 70 from a high of nearly 400 during the 1970s (cited in Carmode).

In contrast, in 1975—one year before the FCC opened Docket 20735—the CPB funded a total of 165 stations (*CPB Report*, 25 Oct. 3–4). Over twenty years later, in 1997, the CPB reported providing grants to 362 licensees for a total of 694 stations. Of these, 362 stations were licensed to universities and 236 were licensed to nonprofit community organizations; 560 were NPR members ("Frequently" 3). This is certainly a large increase, although it must be cautioned that of those 694 stations, perhaps as many as 100 are booster or translator stations, which only simulcast the signal of one main station.⁸ At the same time, the NFCB lists 143 stations in its current membership ("Membership

List”)—a smaller, though not insignificant, increase from around 20 in the mid-1970s and 70 in the mid-1980s.

To the extent that the CPB, NPR, and the NFCB have increased their membership one might conclude that their goals were met in having a table of allocation instituted and having 10-watt stations all but eliminated. Given that 260 10-watt stations had applied for a power increase by the filing deadline, it is likely that at least a portion of those membership increases resulted from low-power stations that advanced to high-power status.⁹ In that case the FCC's goal that 10-watt stations serve as a stepping-stone to higher-wattage licenses was served—even though, in the end, it required a real threat of possible annihilation to effect.

Where's the “Public” in Public Radio?

Unfortunately, while the networks, federations, and associations have gained, the public has lost something in the process: true public radio. As opposed to what is currently called public radio, true public radio is that to which the public has access—access not just to listen and consume, but to participate and create. At this point in time—and certainly for at least the last ten years—the only thing public about public radio is the source of its funding, and even that relationship is getting thinner. For the most part the programming offered up on public stations falls into some established public radio format—classical, jazz, or news-talk, for example—and is chosen, produced, and presented by paid programmers and air staff. Many stations rely heavily on programming from the two principal public radio networks, NPR and Public Radio International (PRI), to provide a considerable portion of their broadcast day. Just like commercial radio, aside from call-in programs or the occasional locally originated public affairs program, very few truly local or public voices are heard on contemporary public radio.

Compared to the 1970s, the contemporary public radio system is very large and well developed. But it is also much more professional and reliant either on increasingly insecure federal funding or on nonpublic sources. Unfortunately, this situation also has the tendency to encourage the squelching of unpopular or dissident voices, for whom public radio is one of the few remotely viable outlets if they wish to reach anything approaching a mass audience.¹⁰ Finally, the whole of noncommercial radio offers far fewer opportunities for the public to be heard on air than were available before 1978.

Conversely, 10-watt stations, overwhelmingly staffed and managed by volunteers, once provided an opportunity for people from a variety of walks of life to be on the radio at a station operated by a local high school, two- or four-year college, community group, or municipality. The freedom of expression they were allowed varied widely but was nearly always greater than that allowed profes-

sional public or commercial broadcasters. But whether the full potential of this opportunity to bring diverse voices and viewpoints to the public airwaves was being realized is debatable. In his 1978 survey of 10-watt stations Creech observed that 55% of respondents considered broadcast training to be a primary or major function of their stations. In terms of programming, over 70% indicated that rock music was dominant, while approximately 20% offered substantial educational programming. Still, more than 80% of the 10-watt stations responding to Creech's survey indicated that they felt they were providing a community service (127–28). Although the value of hands-on broadcast training should not be undervalued, it is understandable that this was not valued by CPB, which has never shown concern for direct public access to the airwaves. It is also easy to see that the public radio establishment—at that time mostly concerned with classical and jazz music—would not find much value in countercultural or rock music programming.¹¹ What is clear about 10-watt stations in the 1970s is that they were not professional operations and in most cases did not mirror the programming of large educational radio stations. It is also fair to say that their potential to allow direct public access to the FM airwaves was not being substantially realized; however, that does not mean the potential was false or unsubstantial in its own right. Carmode notes:

While the number of 10-watt student stations certainly plummeted, it was only because most of them opted to convert to higher power and remain on the air 365 days a year. Now there are even more student stations on the air than before, generally continuing to follow the pattern established in the early days of student radio.

He agrees with the assertions of the CPB that the pattern established early on was to operate stations primarily as training facilities that mimic commercial stations, only without commercials.

Micro Public Radio

Whether or not the original 10-watt stations lived up to their potential, it is much clearer that today's microbroadcasters are substantially doing so in terms of providing access. A strong and unmistakable thread that runs through nearly every account of micro radio stations is that these broadcasters open up their studios and transmitters to broad groups of people who wish to bring their message to the public, unfettered and uncensored. This account of Tampa, Florida's "Party Pirate" is typical:

[Station operator] Moorehead was equally generous with his airtime. As friends and listeners asked to DJ their own shows, he obliged, filling both his house and the airwaves with a diverse crowd of head-

banging punkers, hip hop revolutionaries, evangelical Christians, and country music DJs. “We were basically public access radio,” says Moorehead. (Markels 326)

Speaking about unlicensed KAW-FM in Lawrence, Kansas, Ruth Lichtwardt, president of the local Kansas chapter of the League of Women Voters, said, “I think it’s a good idea to have a station where absolutely anybody can come on who wants or needs airtime” (qtd. in Soley 106). The National Lawyer’s Guild’s Committee on Democratic Communications elevates this notion from a “good idea” to a guiding principle for the creation of LPFM, stating in its comments to the FCC on LPFM:

1. Encourage use of LPFM by those who have an urgent desire to communicate above all else—whether that be communication of information, ideas, art or culture. . . .
 2. Encourage maximum diversity of voices and viewpoints.
- (Introduction)

The purpose of creating a new public sphere with LPFM is even distinctly reflected in a statement by FCC chairman Kennard, who employs the market-place-of-ideas metaphor:

I’ve been struck by all of the different ways [community groups] propose to use the airwaves. . . . But rather than being able to use the available spectrum to test their ideas in the marketplace, these groups are being shut out, prohibited from serving their communities. Today we recognize the important role of more modest technical facilities, and throw open the doors of opportunity to the smaller, community-oriented broadcaster. (US FCC “Separate Statement of Chairman” n.p.)

The Opposition to LPFM

It would appear that the promise of the 10-watt station has been resurrected and revitalized to serve a more focused mission. Unfortunately, as before, there are powerful interests that desire nothing of the sort and are working hard to ensure it. Responding to pressure from the broadcast industry and in anticipation of the FCC’s approval of LPFM, on 17 November 1999 Rep. Mike Oxley, a Republican from Mississippi, introduced a bill to the House, the Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act of 1999, with the explicit purpose “to prohibit the Federal Communications Commission from establishing rules authorizing the operation of new, low power FM radio stations” (HR 3439 IH). The bill was referred to the Commerce Committee, where it remained until after the FCC released its Report and Order for LPFM on 20 January 2000.

On 10 April 2000 the Commerce Committee released a revised version of the bill to the House floor in which the FCC was no longer prevented from creating LPFM but would be significantly restrained in the number of stations that could be placed on the air. This was accomplished by prohibiting the FCC from loosening the technical constraints for LPFM stations (HR 3439 EH). After a bitter debate, where Republican supporters of the bill accused the FCC of illegally lobbying against it, the bill passed by a vote of 274 to 110 (Labaton, "House").

While the NAB and NPR clearly and explicitly lobbied for the passage of HR 3439—with the president of NPR even writing a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* to make his case (Klose)—the involvement of a lesser-known player makes even more transparent the heavy weight of entrenched broadcast interests brought to bear against LPFM in Congress. The *National Journal* reported that "Karl Gallant, an ally of" House majority whip Tom DeLay of Texas who was also "a veteran grass-roots organizer, and a prodigious Republican fundraiser," was representing the large Christian broadcaster Salem Communications in lobbying the House against LPFM and in support of HR 3439. Gallant, whose firm's president is a former aide to DeLay, was also reported to be working on a \$25 million fund-raising effort for the Republican Party to "help pay for grass-roots efforts and issue ads in some two dozen districts where GOP candidates have come under fire from organized labor" (Moore and Stone).

It would be difficult to find a more unabashed example of a conflict of interest at work, or a more obvious instance of how closely in bed the broadcast industry is with Congress and, especially, the Republican Party. That these forces are aligned against LPFM, a relatively small initiative to open the airwaves just a bit, is unfortunately not surprising. As Herman and Chomsky point out, the media industry is adept at lobbying and cultivating relationships with policymakers and lawmakers, such that there is a "revolving-door flow of personnel between regulators and the regulated firms" that contributes directly to the filtering of media content (13); even FCC chairman Kennard—the commissioner most responsible for the FCC's passage of LPFM—was previously counsel to the NAB. Although Kennard responded strongly to the House passage of HR 3439, saying that "special interests triumphed over community interests," at the end of May 2000 the Kennard-led FCC also announced its intention to modify its cross-ownership rules to no longer prohibit the common ownership of both a newspaper and a broadcast station in the same market (Stern)—a clear concession to the NAB.

The Contradictions of the FCC

Such duplicity between legislators, regulators, and private industry should not be surprising to any observer of the broadcast industry, and the positioning of Chairman Kennard is not without precedent. In 1961 Dallas Smythe observed that then FCC chairman Newton Minow

espoused the public rather than the private interest in its policy on broadcasting. But with regard to communications satellites, it is shocking to find that Minow has been at one with his industry-minded colleagues. (186)

This state of affairs led Smythe to pose a question that is still obviously valid today: “Is, in fact, the real role of the FCC . . . one of advocate and agent for the private companies rather than representation of an independent public concern?” (190). Strangely enough, the NAB raises a similar question, although its trajectory is evidently opposite Smythe’s. In its comments to the FCC on LPFM, the NAB argues that

the Commission does not offer any rational basis as to why this LPFM proposal is a technically more efficient use of the spectrum than the same type of low power stations that were found to be “inefficient” 20 years ago. . . . The Commission concluded that the cost/benefit ratio was very poor for low powered stations. . . . Thus, the service radius of a larger stations is more desirable . . . since more people obtain a variety of services. Now . . . the Commission is proposing to wholly disregard its policy. (49–51)

The underlying question lurking behind these comments is: Whose side is the FCC on? Or, how can the commission advocate the public interest on this issue after previously advocating the industry’s interest?

The answer is that the FCC advocates for both public and private interests, sometimes siding with one, sometimes trying to advocate both simultaneously. The ironic element is that advocacy of either interest is nearly always couched in the rhetoric of the public interest, due to the Communications Act’s largely toothless mandate that the commission license stations in the “public interest, convenience and necessity” (47 USC Sec. 307). Thus the NAB can argue that “the LPFM proposal threatens to undermine the ability of stations to serve the public” (52), while LPFM advocates argue precisely to the contrary; what differs is their definition of public interest. The FCC’s interpretation vacillates widely between the two poles, usually ending up somewhere on the industry’s side of center.

Low-Power Stations for Whom?

The thinness of the NAB’s and NPR’s claims that LPFM is counter to the public interest is most visible in the fact that both organizations are very concerned about the protection of an already existing class of licensed low-power FM stations called translators and boosters. These stations may be licensed to operate at power levels on par with LPFM but are expressly forbidden from airing origi-

nal programming. Instead, translators and boosters are only permitted to broadcast the signal of an existing full-power station, which may be geographically near the translator or several thousand miles away (US 47CFR74.1201). Yet the most damning aspect of translator stations is that if they broadcast under 100 watts, which they may do legally, then they are subject to the same reduced technical requirements that once applied to Class D low-power stations (US 47CFR74.1204[g])—the old 10-watt stations discontinued in 1978—and which are similar to those the FCC intends to apply to new LPFM stations. Further, given that there are no ownership restrictions for translators, as there are for regular stations, there is no limit to the number of translator stations that can be linked together to rebroadcast the programming of one originating station (47CFR74.1232[b][g]). This permits the existence of nationwide networks of low-power translator stations that broadcast the signal of just one station, with absolutely no localized content—per FCC rules. One egregious example of this type of network is the Calvary Satellite Network, co-owned by the Calvary Chapels of Costa Mesa, California, and Twin Falls, Idaho, which consists of over two hundred translator stations across the United States that rebroadcast programming from KAWZ-FM in Twin Falls (*Stations*).

In effect, low-power FM stations have been permitted all along, but only for one class of owners: those that already own full power stations. The NAB and NPR—whose noncommercial affiliates operate many translators—are not necessarily concerned about LPFM per se, but instead are concerned about a new class of LPFM that falls outside of its collective influence. Adding to their opposition, translator stations are a very inexpensive way to expand the audience of an existing station in places where, due to congestion, a full-power station cannot be placed. But since LPFM stations are also eligible to be placed in these spaces, they represent a small but crucial blockade to the established broadcast industry's growth into the last remaining open crevices in the FM broadcast dial.

It is therefore difficult to take as sincere the NAB's and NPR's stated fears of LPFM stations causing interference when their constituent stations already operate thousands of similarly powered stations under similar technical requirements. Simply, as should be obvious, they wish to prevent additional competition for the precious few open frequencies left, and for audience. FCC chairman Kennard admits as much:

While the National Association of Broadcasters frequently opposes new competitive services, I'm particularly disappointed that National Public Radio joined with commercial interests to stifle greater diversity of voices on the airwaves. (US, FCC, "FCC Chairman Responds")

However, one national broadcast group that opposed LPFM in the 1970s and has now gone on record to support LPFM is the NFCB (NFCB, *Comments*). This change in position should not be surprising, given that CPB grants to construct

stations have been long discontinued and the vacancies on the FM dial are ever decreasing. These two factors conspire to make it much more difficult—if not impossible—to put new noncommercial community radio stations on the air now than in the 1970s. Among national coalitions of established broadcasters, the NFCB stands to gain the most from the FCC's passage of LPFM, especially since it is likely that a significant number of new LPFM stations will become NFCB members. That said, it is also true that the NFCB's mission, and the mission of community radio overall, is most consistent with the FCC's stated purpose for LPFM, and also most consistent with creating public radio by and for the public.

A Possible Alternative: Internet Radio

As the battle for the airwaves progresses, a possible alternative to traditional radio is Internet radio. Freed from the inherent technical constraints and federal regulation of broadcast, Internet radio has the potential to provide the type of opportunity that many see in LPFM: to allow individuals, community organizations, and other noncorporate entities to broadcast, unfettered by the restrictions that commercial broadcasting imposes. In certain respects, Internet radio does provide just that. A simple Web search for Internet radio stations can turn up thousands of widely diverse sites, from major commercial broadcasters to folks broadcasting out of their basements. In fact, many unlicensed micro-broadcasters, such as San Francisco Liberation Radio, also provide Internet Webcasts, while stations that were shut down by the FCC, such as Micro-Kind Radio in San Marcos, Texas, maintain Internet broadcasts after the broadcast station is gone (Anderson). With such a range of voices and opportunities to broadcast, on the surface it would seem that Internet radio has already achieved what LPFM only hopes to do. However, this appearance is misleading.

The biggest barrier for Internet radio is the Internet itself. Compared to broadcast radio, tuning in to the Internet is an expensive proposition, requiring a computer costing between several hundred and several thousand dollars in addition to Internet service and a phone line, together costing as much as \$500 a year. In contrast, a simple FM radio can be purchased for under \$10 and requires only batteries or a little AC current to operate. Thus Internet broadcasting is clearly limited only to those who can afford it—a significant limitation.

The second biggest barrier for Internet radio is bandwidth. Despite its size and complexity, the Internet still serves users one by one. This means that when a listener connects to an Internet radio station, that site sends a discrete stream of information directly to that listener, and the number of streams served out depends on the type of connection the station has to the Internet. A typical dial-up connection to the Internet, for example, is completely inadequate for this—it's only big enough for one stream. The types of connections suitable for broad-

casting carry anywhere from ten to a thousand times the data of a modem connection, but these too are expensive, costing at least several hundreds of dollars a month, on top of the cost for server hardware and software, at \$5,000–\$10,000. Even with such hardware and a good connection, a single broadcaster may only be able to serve five hundred to a thousand simultaneous listeners (Riismandel).

On the other hand, the only limit to broadcast radio listenership is the number of people within reach of the signal. In a reasonably dense urban area even the 100-watt power level of LPFM can easily reach thousands of listeners, and this can be done for just a fraction of the cost of Internet broadcasting, while reaching people without computers in places where Internet audio still cannot go. Although it is clear that the reach of the Internet, and thus Internet radio, will continue to expand, causing the Internet to be far more accessible to more people, radio has survived it and countless other new communications technologies to serve individuals and communities in a simple, inexpensive, but reliable way.

An Uncertain Future for LPFM

With LPFM still under fire from the broadcast industry, the FCC began LPFM application procedures for the first ten states and the District of Columbia during a window from 30 May to 4 June 2000 (*Public Notice*), while the Senate version of “The Broadcasting Preservation Act of 2000,” S.2068, stalled in Arizona senator John McCain’s Commerce Committee, never making it to the Senate floor. Senator McCain became one of the few Republican proponents of LPFM, where, in a move apparently intended to placate the broadcast industry while also helping the cause of LPFM, on 8 May 2000 he introduced a bill called the “FM Radio Act of 2000,” intended to “ensure the technical integrity of the FM radio band, while permitting the introduction of low power FM” by securing the rights of established broadcasters to sue LPFM broadcasters that cause interference to them (S. 2518 IS). The compromise wasn’t successful. With groups on both sides of the debate finding significant flaws with McCain’s proposal, the bill died in late September (Ahrens, “Community”). Yet, just two weeks after submitting his own bill, Senator McCain signed on to a letter in support of LPFM, along with Senator Bob Kerry, a Democrat from Nebraska, and ten other senators, all Democrats. The letter urges other senators to oppose S. 2068, arguing that in creating LPFM the FCC “was clearly responding to a public need,” and that the commission “answered and addressed” the interference concerns driving the objections of the NAB and NPR.

By October yet another bill intending to limit LPFM was introduced into Congress by Minnesota Republican senator Rod Grams that proposed tightening technical requirements and postponing the issuance of LPFM licenses until the FCC conducts more tests on the service (Donohue). President Clinton and

Vice President Gore, then the Democratic candidate for president, expressed support for the FCC's version of LPFM, but a congressional debate ensued over attaching the anti-LPFM bill as a rider on a budget bill. LPFM supporters admitted that Clinton's support was unlikely to be strong enough to motivate him to veto the entire budget bill (Batista).

Indeed, this prediction proved correct when on 21 December President Clinton signed into law the omnibus budget bill passed by Congress that contained Senator Grams's rider curtailing LPFM. While Senator Grams contended that the bill was not intended to kill LPFM, his fellow Minnesota senator Paul Wellstone countered that the bill would make it almost impossible for LPFM stations to be established anywhere but in sparsely populated rural areas (Diaz). The FCC soon released data supporting Senator Wellstone's position, announcing that only 255 organizations out of 1200 applicants in the first twenty states eligible for licensing would qualify for LPFM licenses under Congress's modified rules. The commission said this was less than half the number of licenses that would have been issued without congressional intervention (Labaton, "255"). The possibility of 255 new LPFM stations nonetheless appears to be a small victory for community radio supporters, especially for those in rural locations, which received the vast majority of licenses (Brazil, "FCC Approves"). The revised rules virtually eliminated the possibility of LPFM stations in urban or suburban areas, which tend to be where unlicensed broadcasters are most active. The results also heavily favored churches and other Christian groups over other community broadcasters. Religious groups received about half of all the LPFM construction permits issued by the FCC, despite the fact that Christian broadcasters are already well represented on the FM radio dial (Gilgoff).

In early March 2001 Senator McCain introduced another bill into Congress seeking to reverse the restrictions placed on LPFM, although support for it seemed unlikely (Albiniak). A change to a Republican administration with the election of Republican George W. Bush makes LPFM support seem even less likely. The opinion of new FCC chair Republican Michael Powell on LPFM is unclear; although Powell supported the LPFM initiative, in his separate statement on the matter he dissented with the commission's approach. Citing concerns over interference, Powell expressed that he would prefer an "experimental licensing" method, which just happens to be very similar to the procedures imposed on the FCC by Congress.

As it stands the future of LPFM in many of the areas most in need of new community radio stations, such as impoverished neighborhoods in major cities, appears dim. Stephen Dunifer of Free Radio Berkeley and other unlicensed broadcasters would continue operating in civil disobedience, while a spokesperson for the National Lawyers Guild, which has defended unlicensed broadcasters, predicted that many quieted unlicensed stations would be "resurrected" (Brazil, "Congress Blocks Plans").

If there has been a resurrection of licensed low-power radio it's still unclear how strongly its heart beats. To be certain, it is not the same animal it was twenty-five years ago, before the FM dial was so crowded and profitable, while the still-young public radio establishment set its sights on LPFM's airwaves real estate. The greatest change is that LPFM, if it survives the tests Congress had laid out for it, will be mostly inhabited by religious stations, rather than the high school and college stations that were once there. The unlicensed radio activists who forced the FCC's hand in licensing LPFM once again are being left out, the result of being too urban and suburban. After Congress's intervention, LPFM station will be used to reach areas not already served by many FM radio stations, rather than reaching areas that are not served well by the radio station they already have. Whether or not it was intentional, the broadcast industry—the NAB and NPR—and their well compensated friends in Congress have given unlicensed broadcasters little incentive to end their civil disobedience, and it's a good bet that unlicensed, so-called pirate broadcasts, will only increase as long as most cities and suburbs are cut out of LPFM licenses.

It all just begs the question: Who are the real pirates?

Notes

1. The use of the term *micropower* instead of *pirate* is generally attributed to Mbanna Kantako, who sparked the movement. Kantako eschews *pirate* because it emphasizes illegality and theft, which is not what he means to communicate, especially because he strongly believes that the airwaves are public property, and so using them without a license is not necessarily theft or piracy (Sakolsky; Kantako).

2. In this essay I will use the terms “low-power station” and “10-watt station” interchangeably, given that they are used interchangeably in nearly all of the literature. Consequently, “high-power station” will refer to any station, noncommercial or commercial, that broadcasts with a minimum of 100 watts of power (no stations were licensed to operate at a power level between 10 and 100 watts).

3. In judging this success it is important to point out that there are more than four times as many channels (frequencies) available for commercial FM broadcasting than are reserved for noncommercial FM stations.

4. This frequency (89.7 MHz) falls at the upper end of the frequencies reserved for TV channel 6; thus use of this frequency is limited to areas where there is no TV channel 6.

5. FM translators are low-powered transmitters whose sole purpose is to relay the signal of a larger higher-power station to an area not well covered by that primary high-power signal. These are considered “secondary operations” by the FCC and as such are not protected from interference by high-powered “primary operations.” However, as will be discussed, they bear a remarkable similarity to the FCC's proposed LPFM stations.

6. For a brief treatise on this topic, see Bekken.

7. These stations were also excepted from the public radio satellite system until the 1980s when NFCB lobbying efforts gained access to the system for non-NPR stations. “NFCB: Yesterday and Today.”

8. For example, WILL-FM, licensed to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, employs in addition to its main high-power transmitter two additional translator stations to reach weak-reception areas.

9. Confirmation of this supposition is a topic for additional research.

10. For a good illustration of this tendency, see the case of NPR's last-minute decision in 1997 to back out of an agreement to air a series of commentaries by imprisoned journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal due to its political subject and conservative sympathies. Espada, 20.

11. After all, the period of 1976–78 signaled the burgeoning of punk rock, rarely heard on radio except for college stations.

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CHAPTER 21**TECHNOSTRUGGLES****Black Liberation Radio**

John Fiske

IN A COUNTRY AS DIVERSE AS THE contemporary United States and as well equipped with multiple forms of media, counterknowledges can never be repressed entirely. They may be marginalized, submerged, and diverted, but there are always traces that the motivated can find and recover. The problem lies in the motivation, or lack of it. It is comfortable and effortless to live in a homogenized social formation from which all contradictions and abrasive edges have been smoothed out. There are many reasons, none of them admirable, for not enlarging our world of experience to include knowledges, possibly discomfiting and disrupting, that come from the experiences of other social formations. This, of course, is a temptation for the dominant only; subordinated ways of living and knowing must always carry the traces of domination, so the luxury of comfortable, uncontradictory complacency can never be theirs. The complacency that flourishes in a self-protective comfort zone will never motivate us to ask awkward questions about how power operates, and the resulting silence is, of course, precisely what power requires.

[In previous work] I have traced some of the main ways by which various social formations have engaged in discursive struggles as we enter[ed] the final decade of the century. Discourse is now mediated and its struggles must therefore engage with the technology of mediation. But communication and information technology does not merely circulate discourse and make it available for analysis, it also produces knowledge and applies power. . . . [C]ommunication technologies are both ways of engaging in discursive struggles and, through

their surveillance capability, ways of producing a particular form of social knowledge, and thus of exerting power. The power to see while remaining unseen, the power to put others into discourse while remaining unspoken, is a particularly effective form of power. Struggles over meaning have to be extended into struggles over seeing, for the power to speak, the power to know, and the power to see are politically and technologically interconnected. Mediated discourse and technologized surveillance will always be interrelated, not only because they share similar technologies but, more important, because unequal access to those technologies ensures their use in promoting similar power-bloc interests.

Discursive power has always been politically crucial, and media technologies have enhanced it, but not categorically changed it. The power to surveil, however, may be different; Foucault has shown how modern states have increasingly relied on surveillance to maintain themselves, and there is a case to be made here that new technologies have so far enhanced this power as to have changed it. . . . Video is not the only technology that the weak can use in their daily struggles: voices must be heard as well as bodies seen. The audio technology of radio and telephone and the writing technology of fax, computer network, and photocopier all allow the socially weak access to systems of knowledge and its distribution that can be used to challenge the domains of the powerful and to defend those of the weak.

Black Liberation Radio reaches three or four square miles of Springfield, Illinois. Mbanna Kantako began it in the living room of his family's apartment in the John Hay Homes in 1986. That year was a year of personal and political reappraisal for Dwayne Readus (as Kantako was then called); he had been blinded by a police beating, and adjusting to life in the dark made him change his lifestyle from one centered on the pleasures of the body to one focused on the power of knowledge. His station is one of the low: low-capital and low-tech. Its equipment cost less than \$600 and came from mail-order electronics stores and discount catalogues; its signal of 1 watt can travel two miles on a good day, a mile and a half on a normal one. Operating it requires technological know-how not much greater than that needed to run a home stereo system. The lowness of its capital and its technology limit its reach to the socially "low": because Springfield is so ghettoized, 75 percent of its African-American citizens can receive Black Liberation Radio in their homes.

Typically, economic power carries racial discrimination. To qualify for an FCC license a radio station must move up the economic, technical, and social hierarchy: it must have a minimum wattage of 100, and, according to Sakolsky, start-up costs of such a station would be at least \$50,000 (Sakolsky). As a result, Black Liberation Radio remains illegal and low.

It is not just FCC regulations on the use of technology that work to restrict its use to the higher levels of the social order; federal law prohibits the sale of broadcast transmitters to unlicensed operators in this country. Mike Townsend, talking on the radio with Kantako, explains:

Townsend: I don't know if people know that it's illegal here in the United States to order the little equipment that you have to run the radio station with it assembled—it has to be sent to you in pieces so that you have to find some kind of an electrical whiz that can put it together for you, but the same company, here in the United States, can sell that same transmitter completely put together in any other country, but not to our own people in this country. Now what does that tell you?

Kantako: It's confusing . . . I mean . . .

Townsend: They don't want the people here to be able to communicate with one another.

Kantako: But you can buy an Uzi assembled!

Townsend: Yeah.

Townsend's argument is valid, but he does overestimate the technical wizardry needed to operate a low-wattage radio station; Kantako has made a videotape showing how simple it is to wire the equipment together and to use it. The video has been widely distributed both nationally and internationally, much to his pleasure.

In 1989 the Springfield police reported Black Liberation Radio to the FCC (whom Kantako calls the "Thought Police"). Soon afterward an FCC official and five police officers arrived at his door to close the station down. Kantako's case was heard first in the US marshal's office and then in the local court; at neither hearing was he allowed a public attorney. He was fined \$750, which he refused to pay (out of both principle and necessity), and he decided to go back on the air. At the news conference on the reopening of Black Liberation Radio, Kantako explained:

It's a question of our rights to the airwaves. When the communication laws were designed we were still sitting in the back of the bus. We weren't privy to the initiation of those laws, the writing of those laws, but we are the victims of the enforcement of those laws, and this is our challenge today, to our right to have access to the airwaves, to conduct our communications with our people in the manner that we see fit.
(Sakolsky, 111)

When he finished speaking he drove to the US marshal's office to be arrested, but his surrender was rejected (incidentally, the officials were more concerned with blacking out the video camera he brought to record the event than they were with arresting him). His aim was to make the repression of black speech more widely known. He points out that only 2 percent of the licensed radio stations in the United States are owned by nonwhites, and of the four thousand unlicensed ones, most are used for commercial purposes. Black Liberation Radio was singled out for closure because it dared to give voice to the

black experience of the police and because, in Kantako's words, "we are showing people that they do have some control over their own lives, and that nothing is hopeless." He stresses the community base of the station and that he is not an individual star but a voice of his community:

I love to brag about the community I live in. This is a group of people that society has no need for and instead of laying down and dying, they've said "Let's arm ourselves with the necessary knowledge and we'll make a place for ourselves." If those in charge of the money won't include us, then we'll include ourselves! (Qtd. in Sakolsky, 111)

Kantako sees clearly that the power of money and the power of knowledge are intertwined and that both oppress his people. He argues forcefully that white capitalism stays in control by "purposely making the people ignorant." So on the radio he mixes interviews with black intellectual activists with readings from black history, culture, and freedom struggles. As in any black community, music plays a central role here, but not just any black music; he plays only that whose words contribute to Black liberation. As Kantako says, "Our music format is designed to resurrect the mind, not keep the mind asleep" (112). For Kantako, knowledge is a weapon and low-tech radio arms his people.

The local police had reported Kantako to the FCC because in 1989 he began to challenge directly their operations against his people. He acquired a scanner so that he could listen to police radio instructions and conversations between the dispatchers at headquarters and the cars on the road. . . . Sometimes he broadcasts police radio live; at other times he warns his listeners when the police are planning to enter the projects. When they enter his territory to make an arrest, raid a suspected drug house, or quell a disturbance, he is often there with his tape recorder, monitoring events as they happen so that he can broadcast them on his return home.

Black Liberation Radio played a key role in what Kantako calls "the rebellion" in the John Hay Homes after the verdicts were returned in the first Rodney King beating trial. Not only did it relay live telephone conversations with black brothers and sisters in cities all around the country, but Kantako also kept his listeners informed of the police movements being planned against them. The station's newsletter claims that, as a result,

some observers have called the "micro-rebellion" at Springfield the most sophisticated in the nation. Scores of young people outflanked the cops in two nights of skirmishes and destroyed the police substation and the housing security office. Amazingly, no one was injured and no apartments were attacked. (*Black Liberation Radio Newsletter*)

Besides monitoring police radio and behavior, Mbanna Kantako also encourages local residents to tell their own experiences of police brutality on the air.

An incident in 1990 demonstrates the effectiveness of both forms of monitoring. Two reporters from Chicago (one was Latino; the race of the other was unrecorded) held an on-air discussion of police brutality. When they left Kantako's apartment, they found police officers waiting for them. They were ordered to spread their legs and place their hands against the wall. For twenty minutes the police tried to provoke them into "doing something stupid." But then, quietly, neighborhood residents began to appear on the streets; they gathered around and just looked. This inverted "neighborhood watch," which saw the police as the threatening intruder, was effective; the police stopped their harassment and allowed the reporters to leave. The "watch" had been produced by the radio. Kantako had broadcast an account of the incident as it was relayed to him by his wife from her vantage point on their porch (Rodriguez). If Simi Valley residents can watch somebody "out of the ordinary," so can those of the John Hay Homes, even if they have to invert the norms of the ordinary to do so.

There are other black rebel radio stations around the country, and Kantako does whatever he can to increase their numbers, for he is convinced that his race's survival depends upon its being able to produce and disseminate its own knowledge of what it means to be black in a white-dominated nation and world. He has coined the term "micro radio movement" to describe what he hopes will eventuate: a nationwide network of community stations like Black Liberation Radio that determinedly remain low-tech and low-cost because that is the only way for impoverished, deprived, unwanted communities to retain control over the communication of their own culture and knowledge. It may well prove that such networks of disobedience are the most effective forms of resistance in a social order whose discipline is as dependent upon knowledge and power as is ours.

Despite Kantako's fears that any upward move in cost or technology will result in the mainstreaming of black radio and the loss of its communal links, larger African-American communities, such as those in New York and Washington, D.C., can and do support licensed, legal radio stations that show no signs of having sold out. The communities have enough black businesses to provide advertising support, and the radio stations are important instruments in the attempt to build a black economy that is as independent as possible of white capitalism. Gary Byrd, for example, who broadcasts daily from Harlem on WLIB, circulates voices that are as radical as any heard on Black Liberation Radio.

Kantako uses the telephone to bring Black intellectual activists from all over the country to his listeners in Springfield. Most of these speakers also broadcast frequently on the larger licensed black stations, and many use photocopiers and desktop publishing to produce information packages and books that they mail to listeners who want written as well as oral information. Jack Felder's self-published book on AIDS, for example, is a low-tech bricolage of typescript and print that includes photocopied pages from biochemistry books, often with his handwritten annotations on them. The use of comparatively cheap and thus relatively

widely available information technology is enabling black activists around the nation to develop a communication system, and thus a knowledge system, that is under their control and largely unnoticed by whites.

There is a powerful undercurrent of defensive separatism in this knowledge system. White media are seen to operate against African-American interests almost all of the time, and attempts to find space within them for more, and less-mediated, black voices have met with limited success. Consequently, many believe that a separate black communication system is as necessary as a separate black economic system. . . . We whites have much to learn from this black knowledge, not least because it gives us significantly different understandings of ourselves and our actions. It also shows us that the knowledge that is most easily and widely available to us is not the only one, and it may motivate us to make the effort to scan the information repertoire more widely. If, to return to our river metaphor, we need to pay attention to deep undercurrents that surface only rarely, we must also remember that there are other rivers that never join the mainstream at all, but that carry water in different directions. They may be harder to get to, but the effort is usually worthwhile. Flows that are outside the mainstream are still a vital part of the cultural environment.

This black communication system also illustrates the principle that what is most visibly and widely disseminated is not always the most significant: less-visible, lower-tech communication by radio, telephone, fax, and conversation is a culture of process, not one of products. It leaves its traces in people's understanding and memories, not in texts—it is thus harder for the cultural analyst to study, but in the local conditions where it operates, it may have greater influence than the mass-mediated, high-tech, high-capital media, whose high visibility may lead us to overestimate their effectivity.

A media and lobbying consultant claims that the right wing has easy access to twelve hundred radio stations across the country, and that, consequently, conservative voices can be widely heard (Bray). Rush Limbaugh's widely syndicated talk show is but one example. In this context, the importance of black talk radio and the very few progressive local community stations cannot be overemphasized. But we must also question why commercial radio, with its comparatively cheap technology, does not better reflect the diversity of US society. Part of the reason, of course, is economic. The local chambers of commerce whose members advertise on commercial radio are preponderantly white and conservative. Radio's audiences may be more diverse than its advertisers, but in negotiating between the two, station programmers are drawn to push the point of contact rightward. Other radio stations are funded by Christian groups who have a long tradition of raising money by moral imperative and promises of paradise to come. More-progressive or radical interests, however, are unlikely to benefit from either of these revenue sources, so they require noncommercial and non-Christian-funded media if they are to be heard publicly. This leaves them with

National Public Radio and its state-by-state equivalents, and this public radio does admit progressive voices to its airwaves in a way that commercial radio rarely does. But, and this is a big but, to gain access these voices have, in general, to speak in middle-class, educated accents. There are no left-wing Limbaughs on NPR. NPR relies upon both public funding and corporate and individual sponsorship. Individuals with the money and inclination to sponsor their local public radio stations will come disproportionately from the middle and upper-middle classes, and a relatively highbrow tone is required if corporate or commercial sponsorship is to pay off in image building. The United States can cope comfortably with progressive or even radical ideas, when they are circulated in well-modulated voices around the higher levels of its social order, but it becomes anxious when they reach its deprived and oppressed. The communication and cultural needs of the upper echelons are relatively well satisfied, and the likes of Rush Limbaugh meet the needs of the lower right. But in the lower-left-wing corner there is a huge hole. The same gap appears in print media: there are plenty of radical and progressive publications for the well educated, but few with popular appeal. White liberals and Democrats have much to learn from the radical populism of Black Liberation Radio and WLIB. . . .

Technological growth is, if anything, accelerating, particularly with the development of computing. Our appetite for new media appears insatiable—we rarely discard the old to make room for new, but add the new to our existing media aggregate. Radio did not replace books, television did not smother the cinema, and recorded music killed neither the concert nor the radio. Electronic mail and bulletin boards will not replace the telephone, and probably even the old postal distribution of pieces of paper carrying handwritten messages will survive. New media technologies may modify the content, function, and use of earlier ones, but they rarely replace them altogether, unless, of course, they can perform the same function more efficiently. So the CD has (almost) replaced the LP, and the camcorder the 8mm home movie camera. But in general, the history of media technology is one of aggregation rather than replacement.

In such a world, cultural and political participation will inevitably involve technology. This introduces an economic dimension to the struggle to make oneself heard, but otherwise does not change discursive inequality. In premodern Europe, for example, everyone had a larynx, but few were able to speak in public and political life. Reference books, libraries, and archives are, to come closer to our own times, storage technologies, but not everything is stored in them. . . . A hierarchical society will always attempt to control the documentation and distribution of knowledge; the need to contest these attempts becomes more urgent as the diversity of the society increases. We can make our society one that is rich in diverse knowledges, but only if people strive to produce and circulate them. Technology will always be involved, and if its potential is exploited, its proliferation may make the control over knowledge less, not more,

efficient. The telephone, the radio, and the fax machine evaded government censors and kept the rest of the world informed of events in Beijing's Tiananmen Square and in Moscow's attempted coup of August 1992. Black women used telephones to spread their knowledge of the real issues in the Anita Hill case, and Mbanna Kantako uses illegal radio to tell African-American truths about genocide. Knowledge struggles always involve the struggle over access to technology. Technology is proliferating, but not equally: its low-tech and high-tech forms still reproduce older hierarchies, and although it may extend the terrain of struggle and introduce new weapons into it, it changes neither the lineup of forces nor the imbalance in the resources they can command.

Postmodern culture is often characterized as one of extreme multiplicity—a multiplicity of commodities, of images, of knowledges, and of information technologies. Multiplicity is also a characteristic of another feature of late capitalism—multiculturalism. We live, we might say, in a society of many commodities, many knowledges, and many cultures. Multiplicity is to be applauded only when it brings diversity, and the two are not necessarily the same, though they are closely related. Multiplicity is a prerequisite of diversity, but it does not necessarily entail it—more can all too often be more of the same. Equally, diversity thrives on multiplicity, but does not necessarily produce it. . . .

The multiplication of communication and information technologies extends the terrains of struggle, modifies the forms struggle may take, and makes it even more imperative that people grasp the opportunities for struggle that the multiplying of technologies offers. Without struggle, multiplicity will not produce diversity but will simply multiply the axes along which power will be exerted, and will thus extend its reach even further into the minutiae of daily life. Without these struggles, multiplicity can all too easily serve the countervailing tendency of greater homogenization and control. . . .

Where the cultural diversity of this country takes advantage of the opportunities offered by its plurality of information technologies, genuinely different knowledges can be circulated. But the responsibility to use the plurality of media to produce a diversity, and not just a multiplicity, of knowledges must be shared by all. We readers, listeners, and viewers need to scan the full range of the media repertoire to find voices to listen to that are genuinely different and are not just ventriloquizing our own in slightly different tones. A degree of cultural diversity is available to us if we have the will to look for it, and the more often we find it, and the more often we take advantage of it, then the more we will help it to secure its place. Similarly, by using the mainstream media less exclusively and less often, we will pressure them to diversify the voices they admit onto their airwaves and into their columns: they are market-driven, and they do need readers, viewers, and listeners.

Diversifying our own experience of our society is, I believe, vital if we are to break the enclaving tendency and reduce the fear that drives it. . . . Fear will

increase the likelihood of that technology's use and the probability of right-wing forces being in power to use it. . . . Black anger is quite properly a cause of white fear: if we essentialize it as black, we will be driven toward building enclaves, but if we recognize it as a product of white domination, we can begin to do something about it, and thus reduce our fear. . . . Reducing fear will also slow, if not reverse, any move toward the totalitarian. . . . It is in the interests of totalitarian influences to confine as many of us as they can to our cultural and geographic enclaves. Is this what we want?

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CHAPTER 22**SCANNING THE “STATIONS OF THE CROSS”****Christian Right Radio in Post-Fordist Society**

Paul Apostolidis

OBSERVERS OF THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT COMMONLY note an interesting irony: although evangelical and fundamentalist theology and cultural norms are defiantly antimodern, religious conservatives have adeptly used modern communications technologies to spread their version of the gospel. They have also adjusted to technological innovations with quickness, vigor, and even a sense of fascination with the new. Evidence of this is readily available to anyone who explores the multitude of online chat rooms, public policy briefs, sales pitches, and popular culture reviews that together make up the vast virtual terrain of evangelical conservatism. Aggressively traditionalist in its explicit message, the Christian right avidly embraces change and sophistication in its media.

The emergence of new Christian right communications forms, however, does not always mean that older media become obsolete. An important case in point is evangelical conservative radio. Far from rendering radio an antiquated remnant of a nostalgized past, the explosive growth of Christian right cyberspace in recent years has been accompanied by the steady expansion of Christian right radio broadcasting. It is well known that much of the programming in the early years of radio was religious in nature. Listeners in the 1930s, for example, eagerly tuned in to Charles E. Fuller’s *Old Fashioned Revival Hour*, Walter A. Maier’s *The Lutheran Hour*, and (less frequently) the notorious Charles E. Coughlin’s transmissions. Less widely appreciated is the fact of religious radio’s continued popularity even with the advent of television and, later, the cyber age. In 1994 evangelical programming was ranked as high as “the third

most common format on the dial, behind country and adult contemporary” (Kennedy 42).¹ In 1997 there were between twelve hundred and sixteen hundred stations with a Christian format in the United States, accounting for at least one-tenth (probably closer to one-seventh) of all radio stations in the nation (Kennedy 42).² Consideration of radio is thus vital to the critical analysis of Christian right popular culture; in turn, an examination of evangelical conservative radio broadcasting deserves a prominent place in any survey of American radio at the dawn of the new millennium.

This essay concentrates on the political dynamics of Christian right radio, arguing that they are more ambiguous and complex than they are usually assumed to be. The key theoretical issues here concern (1) the mode of ideological support for dominant political-economic tendencies that popular culture provides, and (2) popular culture’s capacities for contesting social power relations. More substantively, this inquiry focuses on the embattled relationship of Christian right radio to the post-Fordist stage of capitalism as experienced in the United States during the 1990s.

Christian right radio is a particularly vigorous component of a much more extensive evangelical media apparatus. The play lists of Christian music stations promote the sales of Christian pop CDs in Christian bookstores, which have handled a skyrocketing volume of sales over the last two decades. Christian right talk radio broadcasts by James Dobson (*Focus on the Family*), Charles Colson (*BreakPoint*), and Oliver North (*The Oliver North Show*) hawk books written by the hosts and their guests as well as cassette tape recordings of the shows themselves. Even the Word of God itself occasions a ceaseless din of commercial activity. “Bibles are big business,” Randall Balmer notes wryly, observing that the Christian Booksellers Association sponsors one of the nation’s biggest trade exhibitions and that in this country alone Bible sales bring in between \$60 million and \$200 million in revenues every year (Balmer 196–99). And all this hubbub goes on alongside an enormous television industry, at the height of which looms Pat Robertson’s for-profit International Family Entertainment/Family Channel conglomerate with over \$200 million of annual operating revenues.³

Obviously, by virtue of their sheer size and reach, the Christian media possess extensive powers to inculcate a particular worldview and political agenda. However, they also serve another function that is ideological in a more specifically Marxian sense. By prompting individuals to consume their products at high and steady levels, they accustom these consumers to the more general cultural-industrial apparatus that encompasses Christian right and secular entertainment industries alike. Indeed, these organizations arguably generate legitimation for the political economy as a whole by assimilating religious experiences to the consumerist rationality of late capitalism. The middle sections of this essay explore the specific dimensions of this ideological aspect of Christian right radio, drawing on Theodor W. Adorno’s critiques of radio and (with Max Horkheimer) of

mass culture in general. I argue that evangelical radio confirms two key ideological tendencies of advanced capitalism: the fetishism of commodities and the consolidation of cultural enterprises into a centralized "culture industry" that promotes political and economic conformism. Evangelical radio constricts religious experience, focusing it on the desire to appropriate and possess religious wisdom in the same way that the market makes appropriating commodities as such (rather than enjoying them for their intrinsically useful qualities) the objective of human endeavor. The consumer-believer thus treats religious faith itself (like the commodity) as a fetish, a stand-in for some amorphous higher happiness rather than something tangible that the individual directly experiences in its singularity. By recasting religious experience on the model of commodity fetishism, Christian radio, which includes plenty of religious and musical programming not avowedly intended to promote conservatism in the American political culture, functions as a rightist force in society at large. In this basic respect, Christian radio and Christian *right* radio are one and the same; at the very least, the commonsense distinction between religious broadcasting and broadcasting with a political agenda becomes difficult to maintain.

Adorno's theory is especially useful for a critique of evangelical radio, however, because it also provokes us to consider how this cultural form may exhibit a dialectical relation to social domination, at once reinforcing and contesting the status quo. To some readers, this may seem a counterintuitive employment of Adorno. The theory of the culture industry formulated with Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) (in)famously represents the prospects for resisting mass culture in the bleakest light and has provided a convenient foil for more recent work in cultural studies stressing the subversive potential of popular culture. But we should not treat the culture industry analysis as defining the limits of Adorno's possible contributions to the contemporary analysis of popular culture. To do so would be to overlook the larger context of Adorno's lifelong and ardent defense of cultural experience and criticism as vital to radical social transformation. For Adorno, whether or not music, art, philosophy, or even religion could incite revolutionary consciousness and action depended on whether a given cultural phenomenon preserved (and critically reworked) elements of a historically rooted, specific cultural tradition, attempting to keep this tradition autonomous of the instrumentalist concerns of the state and the market. Social power relations, of course, always inundated any given cultural object, but this very fact meant that in a class-based society the object would invariably reflect social contradictions—and moreover, Adorno maintained, it could do so in a critical, self-conscious manner.⁴

The implications of Adorno's approach for a critique of evangelical radio are therefore as follows. On one hand, we would expect the ideological import of evangelical radio to be significantly determined by its character as a component of the culture industry and its promotion of commodity fetishism. On the

other hand (going against the grain of the culture industry theory but following the spirit of Adorno's overarching intellectual project), we would want to question any simplistic assumption that all historically derived religious content has been entirely drained from evangelical radio or totally transmuted into advertising slogans. As the final part of this essay shows, evangelical radio recalls and rearticulates Christian narratives, in the process establishing a new phase in a historically continuous religious tradition and thus harboring moments when radical insight into society can occur. (These narratives are never Christian pure and simple, however. Like any other cultural form, religious narrative always assumes its historically distinctive shape in the context of the social processes of the economy and the state, bearing traces of these processes within itself. Hence the narrative contradictions of evangelical radio are derived not from Christianity as such but rather from the complex reformulation of Christianity in relation to political-economic circumstances.) As a compass to guide the interpretation of Christian right culture, Adorno's theory thus offers the rare advantage of helping us discern both (1) how evangelical radio functions simultaneously as culture industry and as religion, and (2) how evangelical radio generates both ideology reproducing the social structure and instances of potential insight into social antagonisms.

To map the relationship of Christian right radio to the political economy, it is of course necessary to have an empirical conception of how the current political economy is structured. For such a conception I turn to those neo-Marxian political economists who are in the process of formulating a theory of post-Fordism to describe and account for systematic developments in the political economy since the 1970s brought a halt to the postwar expansion. Fordism was an earlier structure of capital accumulation and political regulation that ensured business profitability and social cohesion through mass production, mass consumption, and extensive government intervention anchored in well-established political cooperation among key business, labor, and party leaders (Aglietta 111–22, 151–61, 179–98; Arrighi 4–13, 269–300; Davis, *Prisoners*, 182–95; Harvey 125–40; Piore and Sabel 49–132). Due to a variety of endemic crises in this regime, which became obvious with the declining profitability, ballooning public deficits, and social unrest of the late 1960s and 1970s, Fordism appears to have been supplanted by a new structure of accumulation and regulation. Post-Fordism's chief characteristics include capital's organizational and geographic restructuring (downsizing and the export of capital and jobs) followed by the current period of financial expansion; the intensification of global economic competition; the capitalization of previously undeveloped areas of the world; the declining availability of high-reward manufacturing jobs accompanied by the proliferation of both low-reward service industry jobs and high-skill occupations demanding "flexible specialization"; the decline and retrenchment of the welfare state; the disintegration of the alliances among labor, capital, and

party leaders that had previously provided economic steering and ensured political legitimation; and the heightening of class antagonisms. These changing circumstances have had distinctive and unfortunate consequences for women, racial and ethnic minorities, and children, who have borne the brunt of deteriorating conditions in the low-skill labor market and a shrinking welfare state (Aglietta 122–30, 161–69; Arrighi 300–324; Davis, *Prisoners* 195–230; Harvey 141–72; Piore and Sabel 194–280).

Commodity fetishism and the centralization of capital remain integral to capitalism in its post-Fordist phase, and thus it is still valid and important today to pursue the criticism of Christian right radio on the basis of Adorno's theory stressing these phenomena. Nevertheless, Christian right radio also reflects—and to a small degree contests—more uniquely contemporary conditions. To illustrate this point, the final sections of this essay discuss how the situation of women, minorities, and children under post-Fordism dialectically shapes a prominent and recurring narrative on *Focus on the Family*, a nationally broadcast, daily talk show that has been the most popular evangelical radio program for well over a decade. In brief, I argue that the salvation narratives of women, minorities, and children on *Focus on the Family* express the contradictory situation of these groups in the emergent post-Fordist political economy. In post-Fordist America public policies and employment trends that putatively disempower women, minorities, and children are justified through public discourses that laud these trends as fulfilling rather than overturning the legacies of the civil rights and women's movements. *Focus on the Family*, I contend, registers this sociopolitical contradiction in the internal tensions of its redemption narratives. This gives it an additional ideological function with respect to post-Fordism: besides reinforcing commodity fetishism and the logic of the culture industry, *Focus on the Family* makes social contradictions appear to have been resolved through the device of narrative closure. But as we shall see, the self-contradictory reformulation of religious narrative on Christian right radio also provides it with an abiding, if feeble, capacity to lodge a protest against social domination.

Let me offer one more introductory comment in light of the other articles in this collection: the analysis below suggests that it would be fruitful to apply a similarly critical recovery of Adorno to other elements of contemporary radio culture. Adorno's studies of the broadcasting of classical music provide an initial model for my analysis of evangelical radio, and a revised Adornian critique of this genre could provoke insight on both enduring aspects of Adorno's theory and the ideological and socially critical components of classical music radio. Taking a hard look at the abiding impulses toward commodity fetishism and culture-industrial organization in classical music broadcasting, as well as the counterideological potential of innovation within musical tradition, seems especially desirable at a time when exclusively classical formats and stations have become financially difficult to sustain and when postmodernist fusions of classical and

popular styles are rendering the persistence of traditional musical forms as such problematic. At the same time, the critique of Christian right talk radio here invites us to consider the degree to which contemporary secular talk radio likewise may draw on traditional narrative sources and thus retain a capacity to critically reflect social conditions *as a cultural phenomenon* beyond being an instrument of political communication. The implications of this critique, in short, transcend the immediate object of analysis; they concern not only the politics of Christian right radio but also the viability of an older form of critical theory for contemporary political and cultural reflection. I hope to show that Adorno's theory can reveal much that is valuable about the social resonances of popular culture if we move beyond vague announcements of the advent of a postmodern world toward a more institutionally specific assessment of advanced capitalist society in the present historical juncture.

Adorno on Radio: Commodity Fetishism and the Culture Industry

In the essays "On the Fetish-Character of Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938) and "The Radio Symphony" (1941) Adorno analyzes the sociopolitical consequences of the growth of radio as a medium for listening to music. Adorno is particularly concerned with the effects of radio broadcasting on the aesthetic character of the musical material and the mode of listening this material provokes as a result. For Adorno, radio makes both listening to music and the music itself far more susceptible to commodification than when music is heard in live performance. The 1941 essay argues that radio dissolves the delicate "interrelationship of unity and manifoldness" at the musical core of the Beethoven symphony and discourages attentive, critical listening. Radio technology is largely to blame for these effects that make the "radio symphony" an aesthetic phenomenon that is qualitatively distinct from (and inferior to) the symphony performed by a live orchestra. Radio broadcasting eliminates the differences and tensions between the symphony's particular elements, for instance, by constricting the dynamic range and flattening variations in the colors of sound produced by different instruments. Instead of progressively developing the overarching musical idea of a given movement, the constant restating of the theme thus becomes mere repetition—it is static and purposeless, draining the music of its aspects of process and unveiling. The radio symphony loses the active, productive interrelationship of individual parts that comes through in live performance, and the structure of the work as a whole disintegrates into a melange of isolated, atomistic moments. In a word, the symphony becomes aesthetically trivialized when it is transmitted by radio (Adorno, "Radio" 113–27).

For Adorno, moreover, the radio symphony's trivialization carries the specific sense of reification. With the decomposition of the symphonic totality into a monotonous battery of mutually indistinguishable "quotations" of the thread-

bare theme, the musical experience as such is redefined by the logic of the commodity. The orientation of the listener shifts: instead of following the development of new musical material out of what has been initially stated, the listener myopically enjoys the mere fact of recognizing the hackneyed theme. As a "quotation," this theme is now something ready for the listener to appropriate: "In the isolation of the symphonic theme, only the trivial detail remains. And in turn it is the triviality of the symphonic detail which makes it so easy to remember and own it as a commodity under the more general trademark of 'culture'" (Adorno, "Radio" 131). The point of the musical experience thus is to gratify the desire to possess this thing rather than to engage one's subjectivity with the thing itself. Adorno writes: "What is heard is not Beethoven's Fifth but merely musical information from and about Beethoven's Fifth. The commentator, in expropriating the listener's own spontaneity of judgment by prating about the marvels of the world's immortal music, is merely the human executor of the trend inherent in the music on the air, which, by reassembling fragments from a context not itself in evidence, seems to be continually offering the reassurance: 'This is Beethoven's Fifth Symphony'" (Adorno, "Radio" 128). It is this soothing reassurance that listeners crave, and this information that they seek to appropriate, delighting more in the feeling that they are owners of culture than in the cultural experience itself. In these ways, Adorno argues, radio listening turns into fetishes the theme, the masterpiece work, the star conductor, the famous musician, and the money that makes music listening possible (Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character" 276–78, 284).

Adorno's views regarding the sociopolitical consequences of the radio symphony should come as no surprise. Radio, Adorno concludes, promotes "social authoritarianism" inasmuch as the fetish character of radio music models a disposition toward the economic system, the state, and society in general. Radio trains listeners in the rituals of commodity fetishism, legitimating the capitalist economy in the sphere of everyday habits and on the most intimate bodily, sensorial level. Culture, which ought to promote spontaneity and consciousness in subjective thinking, instead fosters a mechanical responsiveness to formulaic stimuli and a pacified (though anxious) state of distraction. Severed from any integral connection to the musical whole and any other particularities of that whole that would dispute it, and recast as a commodity fetish, the symphonic theme absolutizes itself (Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character" 286–88; Adorno, "Radio" 131–35). It thereby mimics political fascism in the realm of culture, schooling listeners in conformist obedience to absolute authority. Furthermore, the incapacity of listeners to perceive—much less reflect on—the symphonic whole means that they miss the opportunity to recognize it as the expression of the social totality. Critical social thought, for Adorno, depends vitally on this sort of cultural experience, which assumes (1) that in a world characterized by domination and exploitation, the aesthetic composition of cultural objects will reg-

ister the contradictions of society, and (2) that insight into social contradictions can thus be gleaned by critical reflection on “the interrelationship between unity and manifoldness” at the heart of the cultural object. A phenomenon as structurally decomposed and fragmented as the radio symphony offers useless material for sketching in this way the “social physiognomy” of the cultural form (see Adorno, “Cultural Criticism”).

These specific reflections on radio music serve as intellectual groundwork for the later and better-known essay on the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Here, the theorists advance the extreme thesis that radio represents the fascist potential of American mass culture:

Chesterfield is merely the nation’s cigarette, but the radio is the megaphone of the nation. In dragging cultural products wholly into the sphere of commodities, radio utterly renounces bringing its own cultural products to people as commodities. In America it collects no fees from the public. Radio thereby acquires the deceptive form of disinterested, impartial authority which suits fascism admirably. . . . The metaphysical charisma of the Führer invented by the sociology of religion has finally turned out to be no more than the omnipresence of his radio speeches, which demoniacally parodies the omnipresence of the divine spirit. The gigantic fact that the speech penetrates everywhere replaces its content, just as the benefaction of the Toscanini broadcast takes the place of its content, the symphony. (Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik* 168–69; Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic* 159–60)

Fascist impulses, Adorno and Horkheimer argue, inhere in the very technological structure of radio broadcasting, which can invade even the most private spaces, never ceases its activity, and permits no reply by the audience (Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik* 130; Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic* 122). And as we have seen, radio technology promotes social authoritarianism, in Adorno’s view, through its homogenizing and splintering effects on the *aesthetic* form of the material transmitted. In addition, radio is the “concrete form” of Nazism because of its *economic* features, as the paradoxical second sentence in the passage quoted above indicates. With radio, the theorists contend, the commodity-form is simultaneously universalized and liquidated. On one hand, radio newly commodifies elements of culture that previously had been sequestered from the commercial realm, such as classical music, by incorporating them into profitable media enterprises and by reifying them in the manner analyzed in Adorno’s earlier essays (and suggested here by the sarcastic jab at the Toscanini cult). On the other hand, radio negates the commodity form because it provides culture free of charge, and because the culture industry in general dissolves the free market of liberal-bourgeois capitalism by planning and routinizing consumption through monopolistic organization, advertising, and public relations. For Adorno and Horkheimer, this

is fascist in principle because it eliminates the commodity’s mediation between powerful economic institutions (for instance, broadcasting companies) and the individual. Here, it is important to understand that the theorists are relying on Marx’s critique of the commodity form, in the first volume of *Capital*, as the reified manifestation of social class relations. The commodity appears as a quasi-natural thing whose value is equivalent to its price and is therefore determined by its exchange relation to other commodities. The commodity’s surface appearance thus veils the reality of class domination that structures the labor process by which the commodity was produced—in the exchange of commodities, human relations assume the cryptic character of relations between things (that is, they are reified). Yet as Marx demonstrated in *Capital*, critical analysis of the disparity between the commodity’s surface appearance and its historical process of coming-to-be can also provoke radical insight into class relations. In short, then, the commodity both reinforces and potentially undermines social domination. In turn, the culture industry abolishes the commodity form not by overcoming social domination but rather by absolutizing the latter. In so doing it insulates society from the commodity-form’s ambiguous but abiding revolutionary potential. For Adorno and Horkheimer, radio epitomizes this process.

I now want to use Adorno’s critique of radio listening and the radio symphony as a theoretical framework for discussing the politics of Christian radio. Doing this will clarify how the sociopolitical implications of evangelical radio extend far beyond the Christian right’s prodigious institutional capacities to fill the airwaves with a distinctive message—that abortion is murder, that women on welfare are psychopathologically dependent on government, that lesbians and gays threaten the safety and well-being of children, and so forth. Beyond the communication of this substantive agenda, Christian radio stimulates loyalty to the political-economic status quo through the alterations it makes to religious practice. In other words, I ask: how does the religious practice of listening to evangelical radio qualitatively differ from more traditional religious practices that are analogous to attending a live performance of a symphony, inasmuch as they involve communal participation and a greater variety of physical experiences? How, in particular, do the paradoxically concomitant logics of commodity fetishism and the commodity form’s negation shape the politics of evangelical radio? I will provisionally answer these question by comparing a traditional religious practice, the Catholic ritual of the stations of the cross, to what could be termed a new form of this ritual: the habit of scanning the radio dial and tuning in to evangelical “stations of the cross.”

Visiting the “Stations of the Cross”

The Catholic tradition known as the stations of the cross invites the believer to accompany Jesus symbolically along the way of his trial and execution through a dramatic reenactment. Plaques with painted or sculpted scenes of Jesus’ final

hours commonly are hung in chronological order on the walls of the church. This prompts the individual who walks along the interior perimeter of the building to remember each stage of the Passion. At one station, for example, the believer is reminded of the mocking of Jesus at his trial. Further on, she sees a representation of Jesus stumbling beneath the weight of the cross he carries. Sometimes a priest leads the procession, which often occurs during Lent, especially during Holy Week. But the ritual can take place at any time of year and is often conducted by individuals or groups of lay persons without any clerical leadership. The progression from station to station may include the reading of prayers or the singing of songs, or it may be silently meditative.

By performing the stations of the cross, the believer learns through imitative behavior the path of redemption. The ritual unites visual images, bodily movement, and sometimes music and/or written texts to stir emotion, provoke reflective thought, and catalyze spiritual experience. This practice is in a basic sense educative, and its pedagogy employs diverse sensory appeals to generate a narrative. These appeals not only convey the narrative to the individual but moreover draw the individual into the narrative as a participant. The materiality of the images and rhythms of motion, in particular, make the road to Golgotha seem more tangible and make the believer's personal implication in this road more vivid. These effects probably become even more pronounced in some recent, characteristically post-Vatican II adaptations of the ceremony that supplement or replace the images of Jesus with contemporary photographs of individuals suffering from poverty and other forms of injustice. Other experimental versions take the pilgrim outside the church to visit homeless shelters and food banks—the “stations of the cross” frequented daily by millions of poor people in the contemporary United States.⁵ Thus, whether it occurs inside churches or around neighborhoods, walking among the stations of the cross in liturgical solidarity with Jesus is meant to generate a sense of solidarity with fellow believers and, above all, with persons who suffer from need, deprivation, and violence.

The expansion of evangelical radio has made possible a wide range of alternative journeys between different “stations of the cross.” By these journeys I mean, of course, the actions of tuning in to a Christian radio station and listening to the sequence of programs, including sermons, evangelical pop music, and talk shows such as *Focus on the Family*. These peregrinations, like those in the Catholic tradition, involve learning about the path to salvation and tend to concentrate on the pain and death endured by Jesus. They also may be usefully conceptualized, in part, as rituals, to the extent that radio listening assumes a regularized, patterned form and becomes incorporated into daily or weekly routines.

Like progressive Catholics, moreover, evangelicals have sought to diversify and multiply the narratives related on their route among the “stations of the cross,” interposing contemporary human subjects into the traditional and over-

arching biblical narrative about Jesus himself to accentuate various specific aspects of Christlike behavior. Evangelicals commonly do this, for example, by featuring the personal testimonies of individuals who claim to have been "born again." These testimonies often stress the physical and emotional suffering involved in the believer's own "way of the cross." One of the most popular broadcasts of *Focus on the Family*, for example, spotlights a suburban homemaker who is abducted by a rapist-murderer while out shopping one day; the kidnapping is a trial of the believer's faith, the strength of which she proves by maintaining compassion for her assailant even while he terrorizes her (*Focus on the Family* 14–15 July 1994). In another show, host James Dobson chats with two girls who survived attempts to have them aborted and have gone on to become antiabortion activists, living "witnesses" to what they describe as the horror of abortion (*Focus on the Family* 18–20 Jan. 1995). Another edition of *Focus on the Family* features an African-American urban pastor whose "burden of faith" has involved several pivotal experiences of racial discrimination, such as unjustly being denied promotion in the military and being refused service by bigoted restaurant owners (*Focus on the Family* 16 Dec. 1994). By virtue of these narrative innovations as well as the inherent capacities of radio technology, which allows radio to be heard in virtually any private or public place, evangelicals update the "stations of the cross" and relocate them into what are commonly seen as secular spaces. Here too they parallel Catholics, at least progressive Catholics.

Yet there are obvious and important distinctions between the Catholic practice of the stations of the cross and this loosely defined evangelical alternative, and Adorno's theory helps us pinpoint some of the most sociopolitically consequential differences. Christian radio condenses and constricts the sensual provocations to learning the way of redemption. The interventions of spoken text and recorded music are dramatically intensified, while the visual, kinesthetic, and live musical elements are eliminated. This concentration of sensual appeals tends to loosen the overall structural cohesion of this evangelical "stations of the cross" as a religious ritual, just as, for Adorno, radio broadcasting decomposes the aesthetic structure of the Beethoven symphony. The quality of the religious experience that emerges by participating in the Catholic ritual depends on a dynamic interrelationship between parts and whole, as well as among the various particularities. The diversity of sensual elements can give rise to a variety of tensions that creatively illuminate key problems the believer must grapple with in seeking to follow Jesus' example. For instance, the problem of balancing solitude with community is raised by the tension between gazing at the images, which emphasize Jesus' isolation in facing his doom, and walking (perhaps with others) through a church, a major site of communal life. Adorno suggests that when such differences and tensions between particulars are extracted from the cultural experience, the reiteration of dominant themes becomes mere repetition—a static and purposeless repetition, moreover, inasmuch as it never devel-

ops an idea but rather hammers at the listener with the idea's supposedly self-evident truth-in-itself. In precisely this way, evangelical radio manifests a debilitated religious-practical structure. Absent a wide range of competing sensual provocations, the Christian message comes to seem more unproblematically self-consistent and easier to abide by than it actually may be.

The static repetition of religious themes colors the evangelical "stations of the cross" with the tint of reification. With the dilution of those aspects of the ritual that challenge the believer to realize a more mature faith, the religious content of the experience is hollowed out. Listening to evangelical radio reassures audience members that they are having a religious experience, and gaining this reassurance becomes the point of the ritual rather than having the experience itself. Thus, for example, when one listens to Christian radio one constantly hears a refrain that goes something like this: "Jesus died to save us sinners." As Adorno's analysis of the radio symphony suggests, the static repetition of this theme tends to convert it into the announcement "This is the word of God." The goal of appropriating this divine revelation as one would appropriate a commodity supplants the personal and communal project of figuring out what it might actually mean to live according to this revelation. A fetish character thus attaches itself to religious experience in the mode of the evangelical "stations of the cross": listeners still gain a vague sense of transcendence, but only by falling under the "spell of the commodity whose value is adored by its customers" (Adorno, "Radio" 135). In both the traditional and the radio rituals, a certain surrender of self is summoned. But in the latter, this self-surrender reencloses the individual within the boundaries of the self and its fetishistic desires (while negating the self through its subjection to the commodity) rather than demanding a confrontation with the genuine "other" (which would catalyze the critical maturation of the self).

These effects are facilitated, moreover, by other factors that trivialize the quality of the religious experience offered by Christian radio. The decomposition of the integral structure of religious ritual into a series of atomistic and appropriable quotations is exacerbated by habits such as plucking Bible verses out of their textual context and inserting them into radio programming as "scriptures of the day," using pop song hooks, and having talk show participants use devices to give their comments the aura of authority. And just as listeners to the radio symphony can abruptly exit from even the relatively restricted symphonic space opened up by Beethoven on the air by changing stations or turning off the radio, so likewise can Christian radio listeners terminate at any point their exposure to the broadcast "stations of the cross" (Adorno, "Radio" 117-20, 126). This reinforces the fragmented quality of the ritual, its character as an opportunity to graze on easily digestible morsels rather than an impetus to personal or spiritual development. Finally, there is the obvious consideration that Christian radio often explicitly promotes the purchase of commodities, espe-

cially music CDs, books by talk show commentators, and audiotapes of the broadcasts themselves. To the extent that the aim of scanning the evangelical "stations of the cross" becomes selecting a satisfying basket of such goods, appropriation becomes central to religious experience and the latter is reified.

At the same time, evangelical radio exhibits key traits of the culture industry that Adorno associated with not only the growing ubiquity of the commodity form but also, paradoxically, its nullification. Christian commercial culture today is dominated by very large interests whose advertising budgets, public relations ventures, and professionally planned product development and marketing strategies impose barriers to competition by small-scale entrepreneurs. These pop cultural goliaths have undergone consolidations just as have the major mainstream media conglomerates—for example, in Robertson's 1981 reorganization of the nonprofit Christian Broadcasting Network as the for-profit Family Channel and the subsequent purchase of the Family Channel by an even larger holding company (Frankl 176–81). According to Balmer, the Christian Booksellers Association now "discourages people from entering the business unless they can come up with at least \$20,000 in capital" (Balmer 199). *Focus on the Family*—whose production organization has an annual budget of over \$100 million, a forty-seven-acre corporate campus in Colorado Springs, and its own zip code—has literally saturated the roughly fifteen hundred evangelical radio stations ("Focus on the Family, Tour information"; Gerson 20; Lesage 30; Ward B3). And the fact that most local evangelical stations have limited resources and thus depend mainly on prepackaged programming creates an advantage not only for *Focus* but for other large distributors as well (Lesage 30). In sum, by limiting the range of cultural sources, controlling markets, and deploying advertising and public relations to stimulate a regimented set of positive associations with products and companies, the leviathans of the Christian culture industry turn free-market capitalism into organized capitalism every bit as effectively as do their secular counterparts such as Viacom and AOL Time Warner. Commodity fetishism intensifies within a system that reduces the commodity form from an entity actively mediating class relations to the inert instrument of consumption administration.

The reification of Christian religious practice and the expansion of the Christian culture industry have crucial implications for the politics of evangelical radio. By subordinating religious experience to the logic of commodification, Christian radio promotes a subjective disposition that is disinclined to challenge prevailing political-economic norms and structures. It encourages patterns of thought and emotion that lack "spontaneity and consciousness" and are therefore easily accommodated to the hegemonic common sense of the major political-economic institutions. And as reified religion gives rise to reified thinking and feeling, listeners become increasingly susceptible to political authoritarianism. Profound elements of such authoritarianism are present in the American

polity today, although they occur in implicit and superficially liberal forms rather than in the explicit and triumphantly totalitarian mode of Nazism. They include the increasing determination of elections by large corporations and wealthy individuals, the elimination of welfare state benefits that previously promoted political equality for the poor and the working class, the rapid growth of the carceral apparatus and the imprisoned population, the backlash against the women's and African-American civil rights movements, and the persistent denial of civil rights protection to lesbians and gays. Evangelical conservatives have strongly supported all these trends over the past quarter century—and important reasons for this can be found in the aesthetic and organizational structure of Christian popular culture, especially “Christian” radio. These qualities of evangelical radio furthermore indicate why some evangelical conservatives favor more open and extreme varieties of political authoritarianism, for instance, those that involve fetishizing the Constitution as a “biblical” document and America as a “Christian republic.”

A Salvation Narrative on Christian Right Radio: The “Forgiving Victim”

Adorno's theories of commodity fetishism in radio listening and the culture industry have thus helped us discern nonobvious dimensions of evangelical radio's character as social and political ideology. But are the sociopolitical consequences of Christian radio exclusively ideological, in terms of buttressing the dominant logics of the political economy? Or are there perhaps aspects of evangelical radio that, counterintuitively, offer some sort of genuine protest against sociopolitically hegemonic structures? Adorno's writings on mass culture provide little guidance in answering these questions. As I have noted above, Adorno argued that contemplating the interrelationship between whole and parts in the cultural object could yield insight into the structure of society. Yet doing this appeared to him to be impossible with mass-cultural phenomena, which for him were defined by their extreme loss of structural integrity. Adorno, however, carried out very few detailed studies of individual artifacts of “mass culture,” preferring to write about mass culture in terms of the culture industry as a whole or with reference to various genres such as jazz or the radio symphony. It is thus very likely that Adorno missed certain crucial aspects of popular culture in general, and radio listening in particular, that challenge the status quo rather than instrumentally prompt conformity to it.

The listener to evangelical radio does in fact hear more than simply the fetishistic repetition of thematic “quotations.” Despite the compression and de-differentiation of sensual experiences in the transition from traditional to radio-based religious ritual, something important survives that imbues the latter with an aspect of aesthetic wholeness and integrality: the narrative form. The musi-

cal, visual, and kinesthetic elements of liturgy are removed, but the fetishizing impulses of Christian radio are nevertheless embedded in narratives such as the salvation testimonies on *Focus on the Family*. I will now conclude this essay by looking briefly at the content and form of these stories of redemption, out of which the fetishes gleam like neon lights. Are these stories merely filler, a pastel background against which the fetishes can show off their dazzling colors? Or do they have a more complicated, active relationship with religious tradition and contemporary society?

Individual testimonies to redemption are a thoroughly stereotyped feature of evangelical conservative media culture. As such, they ironically extend the logics of commodity fetishism and culture-industry-induced conformism to precisely that experience claiming the most radical of disjunctures with everyday relations of power: the moment of spiritual salvation. But on *Focus on the Family* the redemption narratives of ordinary believers tend to be told in substantively distinctive ways. That is, the listener not only hears these individuals repeatedly intone: "Jesus died to take away my sins so I could be saved." In addition, she hears the radio voice talk about several more specific aspects of what it *means* to be saved. For many featured guests on *Focus on the Family*, entering the state of grace means the following: finding an uncanny ability to display forgiveness and being propelled by that inner strength to work toward social transformation.

Take Margy Mayfield, for example, whose unfortunately timed trip to Kmart lands her in the clutches of Stephan Morin, whom police are seeking in connection with several rapes and murders. Astonishingly, Mayfield responds to her peril by modeling the gospel commandment to show love and kindness to one's enemies. She embodies the Christlike attitude of radical forgiveness by listening with sympathy to Morin's story of personal hardship, giving him money, sharing her faith with him, and staying with him even when she could have tried to escape. After she leads Morin to accept Jesus and turn himself over to the authorities (who ultimately execute him), Mayfield starts speaking publicly about her ordeal. Her message emphasizes not only the power of personal faith but, more surprisingly, the disturbing prevalence of violence against women and the need to address this situation (*Focus on the Family* 14–15 July 1994).

The story of Raleigh Washington on *Focus on the Family* adheres closely to these same themes concerning what it means to be in the state of grace. While building what seems to be a promising military career, Washington encounters racial discrimination both from white superior officers and from civilian business owners who refuse to serve dinner to him and his white fellow soldiers. Instead of reacting with bitterness, Washington takes these blows in a spirit of forgiveness, concentrating on the joy of salvation. He ultimately finds better treatment from nonprejudiced whites. Some of these decent white folks clear his military record of false accusations; others stay by his side until a desegregated restaurant is found. Together, these experiences lead Washington to

become a public advocate for “racial reconciliation” (*Focus on the Family* 16 Dec. 1994).

Gianna Jessen, in turn, explains to host James Dobson that although her life was almost ended when she was still in the womb, she survived the abortion attempt. Like Washington and Mayfield, Jessen stresses that, without reservation, she has forgiven the person who sought to do her harm, in this case the mother who tried to terminate her pregnancy. And like these other two guests on *Focus on the Family*, Jessen channels her strength to forgive into a mission to reform society. For Jessen, this is the crusade to save the lives of children by ending abortion (*Focus on the Family* 18–20 Jan. 1995).

For the individual who tunes in regularly to *Focus on the Family*, the stories of Mayfield, Washington, and Jessen tend to converge into a single narrative centered on the struggles of a regularly reappearing character type. This figure is the forgiving victim, who displays the fruits of redemption by enduring great personal danger and suffering, displaying unwavering forgiveness, and assuming leadership for social change. Yet *Focus*’s narrative of the forgiving victim is not as internally coherent as this brief overview suggests. Quite to the contrary, its structure is fundamentally self-contradictory in a way that renders deeply equivocal its message of forgiveness and engagement for social change.

For all the protagonists of these stories, the act of forgiveness seems jarringly automatic, even mechanical. Mayfield, Washington, and Jessen evince no indication that they have actually had to struggle to find the capacity to forgive. By their accounts, self-interested thinking and retaliatory violence or malice simply never occurred to them as possibilities because they trusted that God was in control of the situation. Redemptive faith, then, means not resolving a conflict between the needs of self and other but rather wholly submitting to the divine power that takes command of the believer and renders self-centered needs inoperable. And the forgiveness integral to such faith consequently loses its interpersonal quality, the dimension that shows respect for the individuality and agency of the person being forgiven despite their harmful action. Mayfield’s comments are telling in this respect. She claims that Morin “repulsed” her but that “the compassion of Jesus Christ just overwhelmed” her. Here, forgiveness does not mean resolutely recognizing the humanity of the other even when the other acts inhumanely, but rather being spiritually anesthetized against feeling disgust at the other’s essential inhumanity. All Mayfield has to do is “obey” the divine force, “keep her cool,” and stick to the “plan” that God has “programmed” into her (*Focus on the Family* 14–15 July 1994). In short, Mayfield’s testimony transmutes the *ethical* problem of responding to victimization with forgiveness into the *technical* problem of calmly and effectively fulfilling commands. The same vacuous and insubstantial notion of forgiveness resurfaces in the stories of Washington and Jessen. The problem is particularly acute in the case of Jessen: she is victimized as a fetus in the womb, but a fetus is obviously incapable of

ethical reflection on the interpersonal relationship between the tormented and her tormenter. The fetus's utterly passive and involuntary submission to divine machinations becomes the epitome of forgiveness in this aspect of the narrative, in sharp contradiction to the narrative's erstwhile emphasis on its protagonists' autonomous moral agency.

The call to social action is also heavily compromised in each of these stories. Mayfield decries violence against women, but her testimony counsels women to quietly, lovingly endure mistreatment from men who harm and threaten them. Washington models a parallel response to racism: nonresistance (as opposed to either nonviolent or violent resistance) until a well-meaning and right-thinking white person takes pity on him. And within the womb, of course, Jessen is perfectly helpless to do anything except yield to the violence that threatens her; again, the fetus epitomizes the contradictory alter ego of the forgiving victim. For each of these individuals, the jubilant exhortation to transform society in the interests of the powerless clashes with the stern admonition to secure self-preservation by submitting to the higher power of God. As Mayfield puts it succinctly: "You obey Him, because if you don't you might end up dead" (*Focus on the Family* 14–15 July 1994).

The eclipse of ethical reason by technical rationality and the overtaking of the impetus toward world transformation by the drive toward self-preservation are the core elements of the dialectic of enlightenment that Adorno and Horkheimer discerned in advanced capitalist society. As such, they mold the subjective dispositions that underlie accommodation to the rituals of commodity fetishism and the culture industry. At the same time, however, the contradictions of *Focus's* narrative of the forgiving victim express more historically specific conditions of the contemporary post-Fordist political economy. Let us recall Adorno's argument that in a society structured according to political-economic domination and therefore lacking a real reconciliation among political-economic groups (and between individuals and the social totality), cultural objects striving to achieve a harmony between whole and parts will necessarily fail to fulfill this task of aesthetic composition. In Adorno's view, mass culture never attempted this task in the first place; its objects were simply instruments for the accumulation of capital and the securing of political consent (Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik* 133–34, 139; Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic* 125–26, 131). But suppose we allow that the narrative form on *Focus on the Family* does indeed, in some respects, display "the passionate striving toward identity" between whole and particulars that, for Adorno, gives a dimension of autonomy to the cultural object (Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik* 139; Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic* 131). This means acknowledging, in effect, that besides legitimating the hegemonic structure of the political economy, *Focus on the Family* also carries on and rearticulates a historically distinctive religious tradition. In this case, it would indeed be possible to "name what the consistency and inconsistency of the work

in itself expresses of the constitution of the existent”—that is, to perceive the antinomies of contemporary American society in those of the narrative of the forgiving victim (Adorno, “Kulturrekritik” 23; Adorno, “Cultural Criticism” 32).

Post-Fordism and the Dialectics of *Focus on the Family*

The heroes of the three stories discussed above are a woman, an African American, and a child; moreover, the stories demand greater social justice for all of these groups. As noted above, women and racial or ethnic minorities are experiencing distinctive political-economic circumstances in the post-Fordist era. Post-Fordism has introduced new labor market conditions that spell an even deeper entrenchment of social inequalities based on race, ethnicity, and gender. The post-Fordist labor market divides into “core” and “periphery” groups, and women and people of color (including many children) tend to be concentrated in the latter category. There they are expected to perform low-skill work with maximum adaptability to new production systems without the rewards of high wages, permanent contracts, decent benefits, or promotion prospects—in sharp contrast to core employees, for whom the new creed of flexible specialization brings more-fulfilling, higher-skill, and better-rewarded work. Sweatshops and other informal, patriarchal labor arrangements foster the most extreme forms of the new exploitation on the periphery, but the racialized and gendered trend permeates the political economy as a whole (Davis, *Prisoners* 208–9, 215, 221; Harvey 138, 150–55).

The past quarter century has also witnessed a growing backlash against the far-reaching political achievements of racial and ethnic minorities and women from the 1950s to the early 1970s. This backlash has been fundamental rather than incidental to the advance of post-Fordism in the American state and economy. The economic transition to post-Fordism has been assisted, in particular, by public policy reforms in the areas of welfare, affirmative action, and school desegregation. Policy trends in these areas fulfill certain economic requisites of post-Fordism by ensuring the existence of a large and compliant population of low-wage workers. A number of major shifts in public policy are working together to discipline the least privileged sectors of the working class into conformity with the new, harsher norms of the post-Fordist economy: the elimination of welfare benefits, the subjection of women receiving poor relief to the ritual degradation of “welfare-to-work” programs, the rollback of affirmative action, and the shut-down of aspirations toward higher education and social advancement for black and Latino children in resegregated public schools (Hawkesworth; Kozol; Orfield et al.; Piven and Cloward 183). In addition, these policy transformations solve important political problems for leaders of the state in the post-Fordist era. First, they have reduced barriers to post-Fordist economic development by stifling women’s and minorities’ demands for an expansion of the Fordist political

compromise among capital, labor, and the state, as liberal advocates have been forced to fight simply to maintain existing levels of government intervention or to support less draconian cuts. Second, these reforms have served as effective bargaining concessions in liberals' efforts to accommodate the leading forces of grassroots politics in the post-Fordist era, "the revanchist middle strata," organized at various points since the early 1970s into antibusing coalitions, taxpayers' associations, homeowners' movements, and anti-affirmative action campaigns—and, of course, Christian right groups (Davis, *Prisoners* 211–12, 222, *City* 153–219). Third, they have provided partial remedies to the fiscal strain generated by the postwar state's massive, decades-long subsidization of production in the private monopoly sector through "welfare and warfare" expenditures alike (Davis, *Prisoners* 198; O'Connor 23–24).

The ideological politics of post-Fordism, however, do not only involve resuscitating older racist, sexist, and bourgeois-liberal norms. In addition, the successes of minorities' and women's social movements have powerfully shaped contemporary efforts to justify revoking welfare, affirmative action, and desegregation programs. In the aftermath of these movements, many leading intellectuals and politicians seem compelled to characterize the repeal of the federal entitlement to financial antipoverty relief, the banning of race- and sex-conscious employment and educational admissions policies, and the effective nullification of *Brown v. Board of Education* as the culmination rather than the repudiation of the civil rights and women's movements. This trend toward a new, superficially antiracist racism is vividly apparent when education reformers, invoking the slogans of "choice" and "local control," imply that shifting away from race-conscious language and policy will bring an unprecedented degree of equality and empowerment to blacks and Latinos (Orfield et al.). Such rhetoric resounds even more clearly in the language of state ballot initiatives to rescind affirmative action policies in public institutions: Washington's 1998 Initiative 200, for example, billed itself as "the Washington State Civil Rights Initiative" and promised freedom from "race discrimination" (Carlson; State of Washington). And both this inverted civil rights rhetoric and a new pseudofeminist antifeminism are audible when national Democratic and Republican leaders alike tout the repeal of the federal entitlement of poor women and children to financial assistance as an emancipation of the poor from the "trap" of "dependency" (Clinton A10).

In sum, a major reason why the policy backlash has succeeded is that the ideological strategies justifying it claim to fulfill and transcend rather than merely negate the civil rights and feminist legacies. They do this, moreover, not only by heralding a more powerful future for women and minorities but also by appealing to people's sense of moral responsibility—and then defining morally responsible action as forgiving and forgetting past injustice. The language chosen to promote Washington's Initiative 200 perfectly encapsulated this moral provocation:

the campaign's chairman, John Carlson, eshorted Washingtonians to "move beyond race" rather than "dwell[ing]" on it "thereby supposedly honoring "the ideals of America's most cherished civil rights advocate, Martin Luther King" (Carlson). The same thinking could easily be adapted to characterize the new moderate-conservative antivision regarding school desegregation and welfare. In the early years of the civil rights movement, participants in nonviolent demonstrations demanded of themselves a constant attitude of forgiveness toward their attackers, forging power out of the unwavering commitment to recognize the latter's humanity even when reciprocal treatment was brutally denied. Today the call to forgive has become at once less explicit, disconnected from resistance, and far more vast, diffuse, and depersonalized in its scope. Yet it resonates profoundly in admonitions to "move beyond" racism and sexism, as well as in the construction of this envisioning as the authentic, contemporary way to preserve the civil rights heritage. It reverberates, moreover, in the narratives of Margy Mayfield, Raleigh Washington, and Gianna Jessen, and it is to these stories that we now return.

The tensions within the character type of *Focus on the Family's* forgiving victim reflect and reinforce the post-Fordist contradiction between official antiracist and feminist ideology and the disempowerment of women and minorities through public policy and the structure of employment. On one hand, Mayfield, Washington, and Jessen express in narrative form the acquiescence that post-Fordist society demands of women, minorities, and children in the face of newly exploitative labor conditions and advancing governmental indifference to poverty and inequality. Mayfield does this with her unshakable resolve to submit to masculine authority; Washington, when he passively relies on the goodwill of whites to help him negotiate the hardships caused by racism; and Jessen, simply by representing the fetus, the epitome of vulnerability and helplessness. In addition, these individuals' mechanical reflexes of forgiveness mime the compliant pardon for the continuing history of racism and patriarchy that fulfills the new imperative to "look beyond" and not "dwell on" these forms of oppression. The three protagonists model a brand of effortless forgiveness that requires no mutual recognition of a shared humanity between the victim and the perpetrator of harm and no confrontation of the latter with his or her moral responsibility for harm done. The assumption that this is the morally appropriate response to racism, sexism, and poverty is built into the policy reforms of the backlash. The advent of post-Fordism, moreover, has witnessed the demobilization of the civil rights and women's movements. This has eliminated major opportunities for women, blacks, and Latinos to act collectively to achieve power and equality and has left individualized, self-preserving behavior as the only viable response to the injustices imposed by the emergent political economy. This aspect of the post-Fordist landscape too finds expression in *Focus's* narrative of the forgiving victim when the hero's call for social transformation recedes behind the emphasis on securing personal safety and survival.

On the other hand, the stories of Mayfield, Washington, and Jessen underscore the residues of civil rights and feminist ideals in the discourses justifying the very shifts in public policy and employment that disadvantage women, minorities, and children. *Focus's* forgiving victim miraculously finds power in circumstances of the most extreme powerlessness. This is precisely the hope that resegregationist logic raises for minority children in dilapidated urban schools, that the opponents of affirmative action promise women and minorities who remain excluded from many employment and educational opportunities, and that welfare reform advocates offer to the poor who face destitution in the aftermath of cutbacks. The inverted civil rights and feminist discourses affirm that the twentieth-century movement for equality and social justice triumphantly marches on. This enthusiasm is reflected in the activist fervor of *Focus's* forgiving victims, as they galvanize grassroots efforts to punish (to death) the perpetrators of violence against women, to work (as private individuals) toward racial reconciliation, and to fight for the rights and lives of (unborn) children.

The crucial point is that this dimension of the narrative persists in unresolved tension with the narrative's other strand—where powerlessness is not the root of power but simply submission, where social transformation collapses into self-preservation, and where forgiveness is merely forgetfulness. Thus, *Focus on the Family's* internally embattled narrative reflects the antagonistic structure of post-Fordist society. This means that *Focus on the Family* ideologically supports political-economic domination not only by virtue of its *breakdown* of religious tradition, which reinforces commodity fetishism and the instrumentalities of the culture industry, but also through its *rearticulation* of religious tradition, which prompts women, minorities, and children to adjust to more-oppressive post-Fordist conditions. At the same time, however, this narrative analysis reveals the *dialectical* character of *Focus on the Family*—that is, its capacity not only to buttress but simultaneously to undermine the political-economic status quo. Adorno's theory of the social physiognomy of culture suggests the following interpretation: because the narrative of the forgiving victim ultimately fails in striving toward identity and harmony, it (negatively) bears witness to the false reconciliation of ideology and institutions under post-Fordism. This moment of negativity—of revealing the contradictions of the present political economy—is certainly nothing the narrative itself advertises; indeed, the narrative works hard to keep it well out of earshot. Nevertheless, it is still there and, as such, offers listeners a small impetus to think critically about the fate of women, minorities, and children in post-Fordist America.

I do not mean to imply that listening to Christian right radio can therefore just as easily inspire protest against post-Fordist conditions as accommodation to them. Tuning in to *Focus on the Family* on one of the myriad "stations of the cross," that is, is hardly likely to send listeners running to join campaigns advocating for fairer or more liberating policies in the areas of welfare, affirmative

action, and school desegregation. The major part of this essay has been devoted to uncovering and analytically distinguishing the various kinds of ideological assistance that evangelical radio renders to dominant political-economic tendencies, and these combined effects obviously tend to overpower any counter-vailing dynamics within *Focus's* narratives. Nevertheless, we can still speculate on the basis of this critique that when organizations want to pursue in good faith the legacies of the civil rights and women's movements in a post-Fordist society, they should not view radio broadcasting as an inherently self-defeating activity because of its unavoidable entanglement in the logics of commodity fetishism and the culture industry. Instead, groups such as those experimenting with new versions of the traditional stations of the cross—rituals highlighting rather than falsely resolving the contradictions of the political economy—could investigate innovative ways to employ the radio narrative form. Were the dialectical potencies of religious radio narratives to be made evident and accentuated rather than submerged, at least one means for fighting sociopolitical domination with its own tools could be developed.

Notes

Portions of this essay were originally published in Paul Apostolidis, *Stations of the Cross: Adorno and Christian Right Radio* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000).

1. The 1994 *Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook*, an industry publication, ranked Christian stations seventh (Ersoz 212). More recently, the *Washington Post* placed stations with religious formats fourth "behind country, music, news talk and adult contemporary music" (Murphy A1, A8).

2. *Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook* again supplies the more conservative estimate (Ersoz 212). However, the *Washington Post* joins *Christianity Today* in citing the figure of sixteen hundred stations, based on another (secular) broadcast industry publication (Murphy A8).

3. This figure for International Family Entertainment represents the corporation's 1993 total operating revenues (Frankl 186).

4. For a more extended discussion of Adorno's theories of dialectical cultural criticism and the culture industry, see Apostolidis. Also see Adorno, "Cultural Criticism" and Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*.

5. I am grateful to Kathy Morefield for information about the Catholic stations of the cross ritual.

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CHAPTER 23**LETTING THE BOYS BE BOYS****Talk Radio, Male Hysteria, and Political Discourse in the 1980s**

Susan J. Douglas

"LISTENING TO [HOWARD] STERN," wrote *Boston Globe* columnist Mike Barnicle in 1994, "is the electronic equivalent of loitering in the men's room of a bus terminal."¹ Apparently, despite such slurs, this was a place a lot of listeners wanted to go. Why was this, for some, such an appealing destination in the 1980s and '90s? (Howard Stern, Don Imus, and Rush Limbaugh, as well as other local talk jocks, revitalized radio beginning in the mid-1980s, soaring to the top of the ratings during morning drive time or, with Limbaugh, taking a time slot thought hopeless and turning it into a gold mine.) Most of the commentary about talk radio, whether journalistic or scholarly, has focused on two things: its rudeness (the threat it posed to civility) and its unrepresentative amplification of right-wing politics (the threat it posed to democracy).

But what is obvious, and yet much less frequently discussed, is talk radio's central role in efforts to restore masculine prerogatives to where they were before the women's movement. After all, over 80% of the hosts, and a majority of the listeners, particularly to political talk radio, are male.² Talk radio is as much—maybe even more—about gender politics at the end of the century than it is about party politics. There were different masculinities enacted on radio, from Howard Stern to Rush Limbaugh, but they were all about challenging and overthrowing, if possible, that most revolutionary of social movements, feminism. They were also about challenging buttoned-down, upper-middle-class, corporate versions of masculinity that excluded many men from access to power. The "men's movement" of the 1980s found its outlet—and that was talk radio.

In this essay I'd like to provide a brief overview of the rise of talk radio and consider how the recuperation of certain types of masculinities played a central role in the genre's success and in the ongoing American debate about what is and is not our "national identity." And I'd like to suggest that a new gender hybrid, the male hysteric, emerged on talk radio as a deft if sometimes desperate fusion of the desire to thwart feminism with the reality of having to live with and accommodate to it.

Talk radio began to make national headlines in the mid-1980s, when Howard Stern gained increasing notoriety and earned the moniker "shock jock," and Alan Berg, an especially combative talk show host in Denver, was murdered—presumably, it was thought, by one of his infuriated listeners. More headlines came in 1989, when a coalition of approximately thirty talk show hosts coordinated a major attack on a proposed 51% congressional pay increase that then Speaker of the House Jim Wright planned to push through without a floor vote.³

stats. The number of radio stations with all talk or a combined news and talk format quadrupled in ten years, from approximately 200 in the early 1980s to more than 850 in 1994.¹ As music programmers and listeners evacuated the AM dial in favor of FM in the 1970s, previously thriving, profitable stations were faced with a crisis. Some tried the all-news format while others clung to music, but by 1980 the talk format—whether the host was a sexologist dispensing advice or a political consultant fielding calls—was proving to be a solution to AM's abandonment. Talk radio didn't require stereo or FM fidelity, and it was unpredictable, incendiary and participatory. By the mid-1990s talk radio was one of the most popular formats on the air, second only to country music.⁵ Talk radio—and its particular version of radio populism—had arrived.

Like some of the most successful popular culture—one thinks of P.T. Barnum's early "museums," or *National Geographic*, or *60 Minutes*—talk radio entertained and educated, fused learning with fun, allowed people to be titillated and informed, and encouraged them to be good citizens and unruly rebels, all at the same time.

Station managers also discovered that talk show audiences were extremely loyal—once they listened and liked what they heard, many got hooked. In fact, stations discovered that some advertisers were willing to pay twice as much to reach the talk radio audience because of what was called its "foreground" aspects—people didn't use it for background noise, like they sometimes did with a music format.

Satellite technology, first used in radio broadcasting by NPR in 1978, also allowed some stations to maximize profits by distributing their shows nationally. In comparison to the old method of relaying shows from one station to another using telephone lines, satellite technology provided a much cheaper and technically superior method of transmitting a local broadcast nationally. With satel-

lites, managers could choose what they wanted to broadcast and when from a variety of options, and all for less money than land lines. (While stations downlinked one event or program to air, they could also record another program to air at a later time. Satellite technology would come to be Larry King's, Rush Limbaugh's, and Howard Stern's best friend.)

Another invention that especially fueled the popularity of call-in talk radio, and shifted the demographics of the audience, was the cell phone. Virtually unheard of as a car accessory in the mid-1980s, the sales of cell phones exploded between 1989 and 1992. During that period the number of subscribers to cell phone services increased by 215%; by 1993 there were twelve million cellular phones in use, with ten thousand new subscribers signing up each day; by 1995 there were thirty-three million subscribers.⁶ And one of the things they did, as they drove to and from work or in between meetings, was call in to radio talk shows.)

By 1984 *Time* was able to feature a major story on the talk show format, titled "Audiences Love to Hate Them." There was a new dynamic here, one that had been developing since at least the late 1960s, in which certain radio shows sought to rile up their audiences, following the notion that fury equals—and begets—attention, and thus profits. Unlike TV in the 1950s and early 1960s, which sought to avoid controversy so as not to alienate its audiences, talk radio pursued controversy and, again in total contradiction to the earlier years, used this as a selling point to advertisers looking for loyal, large, engaged audiences. In other words, controversy and marketability were joined, so that talk radio developed a "financial dependence on sensation."⁷ By 1995, one general manager of a talk radio station was able to give the following explanation for why conservative hosts dominated the air: Liberals "are genetically engineered to not offend anybody. People who go on the air afraid of offending are not inherently entertaining."⁸

Talk radio spoke to a profound sense of public exclusion from and increasing disgust with the mainstream media in general and TV news in particular. It became an electronic surrogate for the public sphere, where people imagined their grandparents—even their parents, for that matter—might have gathered with others to chat, however briefly, about the state of the town, the country, the world.)

Talk radio tapped into the sense of loss of public life, the isolation that came from overwork and the privatization of American life, and the huge gap people felt between themselves and those who run the country. Talk radio was also a reaction against changes in the network news and the newsmagazines in the 1980s when news staffs were cut, stories became shorter, the sound bites allowed even presidential candidates shrank to about nine seconds, and in-depth reporting was eclipsed by celebrity journalism. Talk radio represented a new, sometimes brashly assertive way of constructing a sense of special group identity

within the homogenizing onslaught of mainstream media fare.⁹ Remember too that by the 1980s, much of FM, once so vibrant and experimental, had been sliced up into predictable, homogenized formats that offered little surprise and no interaction.¹⁰

The talk on political talk radio, as well as the talk about talk radio, was, from the start, decidedly macho and loud. The imaginary audience, the one most hosts seemed to speak to, was male. And what these hosts and their audiences did was assert that talking over the phone, talking about your feelings and experiences, talking in often emotional registers was no longer the province of women. These guys were going to take America's traditional assumptions of associating talk, or "chatter," with women and throw that stereotype out the window.¹¹ In fact, despite the plethora of talk show shrinks and sexologists, by the 1980s it was the male culture of political talk radio that had become noteworthy. Some hosts were promoted simply and proudly with the moniker "radio's bad boy."

Characterizing most talk show hosts' abrasive style as "a verbal adjunct to street fighting," *Time* acknowledged that their success stemmed, in part, from the fact that "the decade's mood has become more aggressive."¹² Talk radio hosts helped build imagined communities that made quite clear who was included and who was excluded. The guy nobody wanted was the new male pariah of the 1980s, the wimp.¹³ No yes-men, mama's boys here, beaten-down types who obeyed too eagerly, who had responded too sympathetically to the civil rights or the women's movement. Hosts insulted and yelled at listeners like abusive fathers, and tough callers knew how to take it. In fact, talk radio proved to be a decidedly white male preserve in a decade when it became much more permissible to lash out at women, minorities, gays, lesbians, and the poor—the very people who had challenged the authority and privileges of men, of white people, of the rich and powerful, and of heterosexuals, in the 1960s and 1970s. Now it was payback time.

As Susan Jeffords, Yvonne Tasker, and Michael Kimmel, among others, have noted, the late 1970s was a period of greatly heightened anxiety about manhood in America.¹⁴ Indeed, one could argue that this was a true moment of crisis for masculinity. Feminists had made gender politics front-page news, and they had demonstrated how patriarchy undermined and threatened core American values, particularly democracy and equality of opportunity for all. (At the same time a panic, it seems, about the legitimacy of America's patriarchal power structure took hold as the country watched one president resign in disgrace, another continually tripping, stumbling, and hitting people in the head with out-of-control golf balls, and a third stand by helplessly as Americans were held hostage by a "third-rate" military power. All of the presidents of the 1970s had lost control, and control and mastery are central to most conceptions of true manhood. And manhood is central to conceptions of American national identity. A new term—the "Vietnam syndrome"—characterized American reluctance to engage in military

action, as if this were an ailment or disease. Flaccid men had made for a flaccid foreign policy, according to Richard Nixon and other conservative critics.

Ronald Reagan, through his rhetoric, policies, and appearance, sought to change all that. Screw feminist politics and getting in touch with your feminine side, said the Reagan presidency. All that had done was to make the country vulnerable, flaccid, and weak. It was time to reassert male supremacy. As if in response, Hollywood in the 1980s pumped out high-action, bloated-budget beefcake movies in which Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis, and others used their tough, muscled bodies to remasculinize America's self-image, which played all too well into Reagan's efforts to pump a great deal of testosterone into American foreign policy, the fight against crime, and the "war on drugs."¹⁵

But Reagan and these "hard-body" movies had hardly resolved the issue. The 1988 presidential campaign was all about manhood, with George Bush and his handlers working round the clock to jettison his "wimp" image, and Michael Dukakis getting pilloried in the press for looking like a little boy instead of a real man as he rode around in a tank wearing an oversized helmet. Wall Street insiders revealed that men with power were referred to as "big swinging dicks." The fear that American men weren't "real men" anymore, and a determination on the part of many men to abandon certain traditional masculine behaviors and roles, coexisted with an insistence that some men were never going to respond to the women's movement, period.)

There were also genuine anxieties about and frustration with what came to be called "political correctness." For women and people of color, sexism and racism had assumed both overt and subtle forms. Many men thought they were being genial when they kept telling a woman she looked nice or persisted in calling her "honey"—why were these women so sensitive all of a sudden? And just when white people thought that *black* was perfectly acceptable, they learned they should use the term *African-American*—not *Afro-American*—or *people of color*. Diversity training and sexual harassment workshops became de rigueur in many workplaces. So many white men came to feel that they were walking on eggshells, that they didn't know what was right and wrong to say anymore, that they wanted a place where they could exhale. Talk radio gave them that refuge. As one talk show host put it, "[T]oday, you have to hyphenate everything. People have no sense of humor. Talk radio allows people to break away from that. As a host I can be like grandpa—you know, 'there goes grandpa again'—I can say anything."¹⁶)

On talk radio, the trend was the same as in many mainstream films—to take over public discourse, purge it of conciliatory, bland, or feminine tendencies, and reclaim it for men. But not men such as Peter Jennings, Dan Rather, or Tom Brokaw, well-groomed, decorous, polite types who told us the news without any passion and who, by their very demeanor, embodied goody-two-shoes men with

money and influence who had probably, in their youth, been president of the student council or captain of the debating team.

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 No, the masculinity on talk radio was different, over the years, fusing some working-class politics and sensibilities with the language and attitude of the locker room. There were clear exceptions to this—the suave, urbane Michael Jackson in Los Angeles, and Larry King, who by 1984 was reaching 3.5 million listeners nationally with his interview show. But Don Imus, Bob Grant, Howard Stern, and their many imitators would become famous for their verbal dueling and for assuming the persona of a horny, insubordinate twelve-year-old boy. At first, growing out of the bitterness of political and economic alienation of the late 1970s and 1980s, some talk radio—especially the version offered by Stern and Imus—was a rebellion against civilization itself, against bourgeois codes of decorum that have sought, especially, to silence and tame the iconoclastic, delinquent, and defiant impulses in which adolescent boys especially seem to revel and delight. Here the transgressions of the unreconstructed class troublemaker were packaged up and sold to an audience of eager buyers. But Imus and Stern were not just mindlessly celebrating pubescent anarchy for its own sake, although certainly at times it seemed that way. They, and Limbaugh, spoke to many men on the wrong end of power relations, men excluded from the upper levels of America's social hierarchies where restraint, rationality, good taste, good manners, and deference marked who was allowed in. They insisted there was a place—an important place—for disobedience, hedonism, disrespect, bad taste, and emotionalism.

In *Talk Radio and the American Dream*, the only book on those early years of the format, Murray Levin describes talk radio as “the province of proletariat discontent, the only mass medium easily available to the underclass.”¹⁷ Focusing on two political talk shows in New England between 1977 and 1982, including the highly successful *Jerry Williams Show*, Levin found that callers felt themselves to be quite marginalized from media versions of the political mainstream, deeply distrustful of political and business institutions, and profoundly anxious about the collapse of community and civility.

Levin cites pollster Daniel Yankelovich, who documented various manifestations of Americans' escalating mistrust of a range of national institutions. “Trust in government,” he reported in the late 1970s, “declined dramatically from almost 80% in the late 1950s to about 33% in 1976. Confidence in business fell from approximately a 70% level in the late '60s to about 15% today.” The press, the military, and elite professionals such as doctors and lawyers all suffered a similar sharp drop in trust, according to the polls. More to the point, noted Yankelovich, “[a] two-thirds majority felt that what they think ‘really doesn't count.’”¹⁸

It was lower-middle-class and working-class men especially, Levin reports, who eagerly sought an outlet, a platform, for what they thought. And call-in talk radio shows, beginning in the late 1970s, provided access to such a podium, while also keeping the caller invisible and preserving his or her anonymity.

While television news and talk shows such as *Inside Washington* and *This Week with David Brinkley* favored as commentators, experts, and guests those who were well spoken, well educated, influential, or famous, the radio version invited those with poor grammar, polyester clothes, bad haircuts, and only a high school education to hold forth on national and local affairs. Levin argued that the absence of those stiff protocols that delimited and restrained a commentator's performance on television was key to talk radio's spontaneity and informality, which in turn were key to the format's appeal.¹⁹ We should also note that talk radio didn't require codified, elite ways of speaking. Those not savvy in official-speak were welcome, even urged to call in, at least in the early days. Of course, such callers also helped to make the host appear more knowledgeable, more in command, more deserving of controlling the mike.

Levin taped seven hundred hours of talk radio and found among callers a discourse "preoccupied with emasculation." The proper order of things now seemed inverted, upside down, so that crime, blacks, rich corporations, women, and inept bureaucracies all had the upper hand.²⁰ The Iranian hostage crisis—and Jimmy Carter's failed efforts to overcome it—further exacerbated a sense that America had become weak, could be bullied, and was being compromised by soft-spoken New Age guys. As with the linguistic slapstick of 1930s radio comedy, the "verbal martial arts," as Levin puts it, assumed center stage here too. Talk radio was a linguistic battleground, and few callers had the skills, or position of authority, to deflect the verbal salvos and put-downs of the host. Yet they kept coming back for more.

It was the participatory ethos of talk radio, its suggestion that it would reverse years of the ongoing consolidation and centralization of power—especially in Washington—that was central to its appeal. (The great irony is that this very kind of talk radio, with its new macho populism, was the product of government deregulation, merger mania, and corporate consolidation during the 1980s and beyond. Populism and participation were the public faces of radio; they masked increased economic concentration and heightened barriers to entry for all but the very rich in the industry itself. But then again, that was the Reagan administration's great genius—selling the increased concentration of wealth as a move back toward democracy.)

Mark Folwer's FCC championed the deregulation of radio in the 1980s, allowing companies to own greater numbers of stations, and eliminating restrictions on how long a company had to hang onto a station before turning around and reselling it for a higher price. The other significant deregulatory move in the 1980s was the abandonment of the Fairness Doctrine, which the FCC announced in 1987 it would no longer enforce.²¹ In practice the doctrine was meant to do two things: mandate that stations were required to cover controversial issues of public importance, and provide differing points of view about such issues.

Abandonment of the Fairness Doctrine means, in part, that a radio station can air Rush Limbaugh followed by G. Gordon Liddy and is not required then to air a liberal talk show or to bring on anyone who might challenge or correct these guys' assertions. It was this powerful constellation of forces in the 1980s—satellite technology, deregulation, and a sense among many Americans, and especially many men, that they were not being addressed or listened to by the mainstream media—that propelled the new genre, talk radio, into a national phenomenon and a national political force. By 1992 the talk radio format claimed 875 stations nationally, up from 238 in 1987.

The 1989 fax attacks on the proposed congressional pay raises alerted those out of the talk radio loop that something was afoot, but it was the 1992 presidential campaign and the torpedoing of Zoë Baird's nomination for attorney general that made talk radio, and Rush Limbaugh in particular, national, front-page news. Ross Perot launched his presidential campaign on talk radio and TV, and Bill Clinton, eager to circumvent the mainstream press after reporters put him on the spot for his alleged affair with Gennifer Flowers, sought out radio and TV talk show hosts. Some listeners, already alienated by the network news, were turning increasingly to talk radio and political talk TV to get more thorough discussion of the issues. And in 1992 they were not to be disappointed. One study showed that television talk shows often featured three times as much substantive coverage of the issues themselves than did the network news.²² Poll respondents said they felt they learned things about the candidates from talk radio during the 1992 campaign that they didn't learn elsewhere.

Limbaugh became the poster boy for all of political talk radio. He boasted that in 1994 alone there were 4,635 stories written about him.²³ Although his political influence was no doubt exaggerated, he raised fears that a conservative, activist minority was circumventing representative government, undermining the role of objectivity in the press, and imposing the will of an unrepresentative minority on public policy. While acknowledging that talk radio was "a needed jolt to sclerotic Washington," *Newsweek* also cautioned that "it raises the specter of government by feverish plebiscite—an entertaining, manipulable and trivializing process that could eat away at the essence of representative democracy."²⁴ As *Time* put it in 1989, "the current radio activism . . . has elements of a *Meet John Doe* nightmare."²⁵ In part, of course, this was a potential nightmare for *Time* itself, and for newspapers and the networks news, all of whom were experiencing a decline in their audiences. Talk radio was a new, sexy competitor—for people's attention, for political influence, and for advertising dollars. And media coverage of talk radio, which more often than not was alarmist and negative, reflected these anxieties. In the aftermath of the Zoe Baird debacle, *Newsweek* did a cover story titled "The Power of Talk." The blaring headlines were superimposed over a huge, open, angry, yelling mouth that took up the entire cover.²⁶

Much of the debate about the possible pernicious influences of talk radio stemmed from this very real threat that the new genre posed to its more established rivals. But the debate also reflected pronounced concerns about a decline of “civility” and the collapse of “civil discourse.” These are debates about the public sphere, about how to reconstruct one, and about just *whose* public sphere it’s going to be anyway, the educated bourgeoisie’s or the rabble rousers’?

What was being threatened, especially from the academic and journalistic point of view, were middle-class, elite notions about the public sphere and citizenship, as well as established notions about journalism, commentary, experts, and who gets to be a source. These were hardly frivolous concerns, given that G. Gordon Liddy advocated the killing of federal agents, Ken Hamblin referred to James Brady as “that cripple,” J. Paul Emerson of KSFO announced that he “hated the Japs,” and Bob Grant called African Americans “sub-humanoids, savages.”²⁷ Nor were journalists, who were compelled to fact-check everything, sanguine about many of these hosts offering their own, often misinformed opinion as fact, or about allowing callers to start a panic about cellular phones causing cancer.)

But many in the talk show business felt that the more outrageous types—Liddy, Stern, and Grant—were singled out to stand for all talk show hosts in a way that was alarmist about the entire genre. “There is much more diversity than the stereotypes suggest,” insisted industry analyst Jim Casale, adding that “we’ve been demonized.”²⁸ Talk show host Mark Williams also felt that the attention given to talk radio was “all out of proportion to its influence.”²⁹ This was ~~part of the ongoing battle in America over control of public discourse, a battle that has~~ always been based on class, gender, and racial antagonisms. (Talk show hosts were not just storming the media citadel; they were thumbing their noses at bourgeois conventions about political debate, public dialogue, and who deserves access to the soapbox.)

No discussion of talk radio can proceed without considering the meteoric rise of Howard Stern and his archrival Don Imus, both of whom worked for Infinity Broadcasting and each of whom claimed five million listeners by the mid-1990s.³⁰ Stern’s revisionist and, in the end, cowardly movie *Private Parts* sought to whitewash the depth of his racist, sexist, and vulgar remarks throughout his tenure on the air—his voiceover in the film kept claiming, “Everything I do is misunderstood”—but it was these very transgressions that made him a millionaire. So did his celebration of locker room masculinity, bullying yet self-deprecating, working-class yet college-educated, quintessentially adolescent yet adult. (The Stern of *Private Parts* was a mensch, like Woody Allen before Soon-Yi, who bemoaned the fact that he was “hung like a three-year-old,” threw up after he was forced to fire someone, and only wanted to be loved by the public; his main targets were pigheaded and autocratic broadcasting executives. The Stern on the air, however, was something else.

He was perfect for the Reagan years. The Reagan administration, with its attacks on affirmative action, “welfare queens,” “bleeding heart” liberal politics, and abortion, and its celebration of greed, often used coded terms and laden symbols to give Americans permission to be selfish, sexist, racist, uncharitable. There was nothing coded about Stern, with the possible exception of his flowing-over-the-shoulders hair. Buoyed up by this political climate, he took the gloves off and articulated in explicit terms what this new backlash politics was all about. His deejay persona as a shock jock emerged on WWDC-FM in Washington, DC, in 1981, and tripled the station’s morning drive-time audience.) He then went to WNBC-AM in New York and got fired three years into the job, presumably because of routines such as “Bestiality Dial-a-Date.” Infinity’s WXRK, known as K-Rock, quickly hired him for the morning slot, and his show soon zoomed to number one (beating out Imus, also on in New York at the same time).

In 1990 he signed a five-year contract with Infinity reportedly worth \$10 million, and by 1992 he was heard in ten cities around the country.³¹ He was the first local deejay to have a national drive-time audience, thanks to the marvels of satellite technology. His core audience was white, often working-class men ages eighteen to thirty-four,³² but he also attracted others, including women, and many listeners had a love-hate relationship with him. His draw was that each day you never knew which taboos he would violate next, what scandal he might commit.

How far would he go today? Would it be farther than yesterday? Stern was a linguistic stripper, teasing his audience that maybe today, maybe tomorrow, he would really take it all off, although it was often hard to imagine what boundaries there were left to violate. He was also often very funny—not, to my mind, when he was humiliating women, people with disabilities, and blacks, although clearly others found this hilarious, but when he took on celebrities he thought were arrogant, hypocritical, or both. People with real distaste for many of Stern’s routines adored his skewering of Kathie Lee Gifford, Bryant Gumbel, and Tom Hanks’s bathetic acceptance speech when he won the Oscar for *Philadelphia*. Stern’s populism emerged especially when he ridiculed the self-importance and mediocrity of a celebrity culture that the rest of the media profited from, promoted, and took all too seriously. With celebrity journalism spreading like anthrax and the Hollywood publicity juggernauts ramming through all the media, Stern just said no. This was the antithesis of the TV talk show host who had to suck up to celebrities who were pushing their latest “projects.” Stern gleefully flattened these hierarchies and exposed them as arbitrary, ridiculous, and often utterly without justification.

Stern’s on-air persona was that of the class troublemaker—and often the bully—in seventh grade, the guy who made fart noises during study hall and tried to snap girls’ bra straps in the cafeteria. He was obsessed with sex and was also relentlessly self-absorbed. One of the adjectives most frequently used to describe him was *pubescent*. This is telling in more than the obvious way. Because

Stern assumed different identities at different times—one minute the insecure, almost feminized boy, the next minute the mouthy, arrogant stud—he enacted those swings between masculine and feminine, confident and abject, that young men really experienced. While it's true that his commentary seemed aimed at twelve-year-old boys, this characterization also lets him off the hook. For the persona was also that of a grown man, and a deeply cynical one at that, who hated liberal politics and who insisted that unreconstructed white men get back on top. (He was antigovernment and anti-immigrant, and said the LA police were right to beat Rodney King.³³ He combined adolescent humor about toilets, breasts, penises, passing gas, and jerking off with politically reactionary jokes that harked back to minstrel shows and burlesque. He was especially determined to defy the new, liberal sensibilities about race, gender, physical disabilities, and sexual preference that had emerged from the social movements of the 1960s and '70s. He was also determined to expose the hypocrisy of a culture that is often prudish and pornographic at exactly the same time.

This was a volatile and, it seems, deliberately incoherent combination of libertarian, liberal, and conservative sensibilities. He was pro-choice and, in what came to be one of his most oft-cited quips, suggested that any woman who voted for George Bush might as well mail her vagina to the White House. His defiance of all codes of decorum, his insistence that sex was something you talked about in the open, and that nothing and no one were sacred made him very hip, very 1980s. Yet in his on-air comments to female and African-American guests he alluded longingly back to the 1950s, when Jim Crow was still the law of the land and the objectification of women was both commonplace and celebrated. He told the Pointer sisters that he wished he could be their "Massa Howard." "The closest I came to making love to a black woman," he announced, "was masturbating to a picture of Aunt Jemima." On newscaster Connie Chung: "For an Oriental woman, she has big breasts."³⁴

In other words, Stern embodied the edict "Question authority" and challenged convention, tradition, and bourgeois morality every chance he got. Yet the framework within which this occurred could not have been more utterly conventional, more conformist to deep-seated American attitudes and prejudices about men, women, people of color, and the order of things circa 1952. So Stern's listeners could be, vicariously, iconoclasts and traditionalists at the same time, totally hip yet stick-in-the-mud.

Stern was a brilliant Peter Pan. He created a space where men didn't have to overcome their socialization as boys—they didn't have to grow up and leave never-never land and go back to that stuffy old Victorian nursery, at least not until the show was over. (Moms and middle-class mores said that you had to learn how to be a gentleman, be polite to girls and deferential to superiors, learn how to make a living and become a responsible and civilized young man. Not on Stern's show you didn't.)

The bridge person between Stern and Limbaugh was Don Imus, the real pioneer of the format. As early as 1971, when he was a deejay on WNBC in New York, Imus was offering irreverent, insulting humor in between Top 40 hits.³⁵ He became enormously successful, and *Life* magazine labeled him “the most outrageous disc jockey anywhere.” (But his alcoholism seriously hampered his work, and he was fired in 1977. He subsequently returned to WNBC but then became addicted to cocaine. It was not until 1988, after Imus had gone through a rehab program and got a new show on his old WNBC-AM station, now owned by Infinity and redubbed WFAN, that he began to be, again, a major figure in talk radio.) Within three years *Imus in the Morning* was the third-ranked program among men between twenty and fifty-four, but he had more male listeners making over \$100,000 than any other morning talk show.³⁶

Imus has not escaped the adjective *juvenile*, and Dinitia Smith, writing for *New York* magazine, likened listening to *Imus in the Morning* to “being stuck in a classroom with a bunch of prepubescent boys while the teacher is out of the room. Imus lets the educated male who grew up in the sixties and was taught not to judge women simply by the size of their breasts to be, for one glorious moment of his day, an unreconstructed chauvinist pig.”³⁷ (Like Stern, nothing is sacred, and Imus’s show was replete with the de rigueur breast and penis jokes, attacks on homosexuals and African Americans, and tasteless characterizations of women, especially famous ones such as Madonna, who was referred to as a “two-legged yeast infection,” and Monica Lewinsky, “the fat slut.”³⁸) He is simultaneously infantile and autocratic, as one of his favorite things to do is ban somebody “for life” from appearing on the show.

But the difference between Imus and Stern was that Imus was more explicitly political. (“Imus,” notes media critic Howard Kurtz, “meshed eighth-grade locker-room jokes with fairly serious talk from pundits and politicians.”³⁹ He featured commentary by Jeff Greenfield and Anna Quindlen, read and deconstructed items from the day’s newspapers, and invited politicians on the show.) He made national headlines when Bill Clinton, whom Imus had been trashing throughout the spring of 1992 as a “hick” and a “bubba,” appeared on his show and charmed listeners—and, temporarily, Imus himself—by holding his own against Imus and quipping that “Bubba is just southern for ‘mensch.’”⁴⁰ Imus expressed grudging admiration, and when Clinton won the New York State primary, some credited Imus’s endorsement as helping push Clinton over the top. His stock as star maker went up. By the late 1990s Imus also was syndicated on over a hundred stations in cities around the country and could also be seen on MSNBC, reaching over ten million listeners.

In focus groups, Imus fans say they especially like his parodying of public figures, bringing them down from their pedestals and stripping them of their aura. As one man put it, “[H]e’s not afraid to poke fun at people and poke hard,” even with prominent political guests or media stars. This fan added, quite

tellingly, that Imus in the morning “gets me going real good.” He liked that Imus got his juices flowing first thing, that he knew, with every show, he would be jolted out of a politically and intellectually dulled state and made to think and laugh at the same time. Fans like this are sick of spin and news management, weary of the deferential constraints that bond journalists and politicians together in their staged minuets, and eager for a deflation of decorum and pretense. They want hierarchies flattened, and Imus gives this to them. They can’t say whatever they feel like at work; Imus can. Most TV morning show hosts, and certainly late night talk show hosts, have to please and flatter their guests. Not Imus. The guest must entertain and inform *him* or be subject to his withering dismissals, and now that he has taken to plugging books that he likes, single-handedly creating best-sellers, guests with books to sell are only too eager to please. For many of his listeners, Imus turns the tables on money, power, and entitlement, where polite people in prestigious and influential jobs have to “suck up,” as Imus puts it, to a man who breaks all the rule of bourgeois, upper-middle-class decorum.

Stern’s and Imus’s success as “shock jocks” raised alarm that now radio was cultivating the worst in its white male listeners by encouraging them to repudiate the achievements, however partial, won by women, people of color, gays and lesbians, and the disabled. But when the press itself, and much of the white male power structure in Washington, felt threatened by talk radio, this became a major story. And the man who made political talk radio a national concern, rightly or wrongly, was Rush Limbaugh. By the early 1990s all sorts of power was attributed to him, and he himself boasted that he was “the most dangerous man in America.” When former congressman Vin Weber introduced Rush Limbaugh to freshmen Republicans in 1994, celebrating their takeover of Congress, he said, “Rush Limbaugh is really as responsible for what has happened as any individual in America.”

Limbaugh was, to the early 1990s, what Father Coughlin was to the early 1930s: a radio orator who made many people feel that he gave voice to what they really felt but hadn’t yet put into words. One fan especially liked Limbaugh because he “articulates things in a way they haven’t been articulated before.” Limbaugh “fills in the blanks.” When conservatives hear Limbaugh, according to this listener, they say to themselves “Why can’t I say it like that?” and “Yes, that’s the way I feel.”⁴¹ While only somewhere between 6 and 9% percent of the population listens to him on a daily basis, this still amounted to, by 1992, the largest audience in political talk radio, estimated at somewhere between twelve million and twenty million listeners. In 1992 Limbaugh was heard on 529 stations; three years later 660 stations aired his show. He earned \$1.7 million a year.⁴² And he had gone national only in 1988.

Limbaugh did the unprecedented: he gathered a large audience in the early afternoon, a slot thought to be dead compared to morning and evening drive

time. And he succeeded in having a New York-based show go national (Some restaurants and bars opened “Rush rooms” so that his fans, who called themselves “dittoheads,” could gather and listen together while having lunch.⁴³ Most of his listeners were white, and many had a higher income than the general population.) Nearly 80% of those who listened often to Limbaugh expressed Republican sentiments; two-thirds identified themselves as conservative. They often expressed significantly greater interest in politics and public affairs than nonlisteners. For example, a whopping 90% of those who reported listening often to Limbaugh said they voted in the off-year elections of 1994. His listeners are more likely to talk about politics and to engage in political activities.⁴⁴ So even though Limbaugh may be preaching to the choir, the fact that this is an activist choir that can be mobilized to fax, write letters to Congress, and jam the White House switchboard gave him and his listeners considerable clout.

By 1990 Limbaugh had become a critically important opinion leader for many, who didn’t necessarily have their positions changed by Limbaugh but who learned how to think about particular issues after listening to him.⁴⁵ His brilliance was in bringing humor and irreverence to what had been a pretty laced-up, overly serious form, conservative commentary. He was particularly skillful in his use of metaphors and had a talent for distilling issues down to their most simple elements. He delighted in conjuring up vivid mental images of environmentalists as wacko tree-huggers and feminists as combat-boot-wearing, goose-stepping “feminazis.” He zoomed right into signifiers of class privilege. (Academics, for example, were the “arts-and-croissant, wine-and-Brie crowd.” He nicknamed the anchor of *CBS Nightly News* “Dan Blather.” Clinton was “the Schlickmeister.”)

Another of Limbaugh’s brilliant strokes was that his show provided an on-air political Elderhostel for those long out of the classroom who wanted and needed guidance in a media-saturated, spin-governed world. He labeled his show the “Institute for Advanced Conservative Studies” and addressed his listeners as if he sensed that they missed the act of being educated, of being privy to knowledge that others don’t have. Limbaugh has been denounced for being a demagogue, but his real persona is that of pedagogue. He brought his listeners into a spectral lecture hall and helped them see themselves as part of a literate community where everyday people, and not just elites, must have knowledge, because knowledge is power. This wasn’t a one-shot class; this was an ongoing seminar in which you didn’t just learn isolated infobits but acquired a broader framework that constituted a worldview.

While, increasingly, the network news and the newsmagazines addressed their audiences as consumers, Limbaugh addressed his as citizens. Limbaugh read to his audience from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, quoted from the network news, and juxtaposed these excerpts with hot-off-the-press faxes that he received from “inside” conservative sources who allegedly had the

“real” truth. Limbaugh fans emphasize that his show “provides information you can’t get anyplace else” and that he increases people’s “political savvy.”

Limbaugh was also deft at flattering his audience. He encouraged listeners to see themselves as competent media critics who could detect media bias, sensationalism, and superficiality. But at the same time they still needed a teacher. As he said in 1996, “I believe that the most effective way to persuade people is . . . to speak to them in a way that makes them think that they reached certain conclusions on their own.”⁴⁶ Yet his caller screening practices gave preference to sycophants who offered very high teacher evaluations on the air. As Limbaugh told Howard Kurtz, “The purpose of a call is to make me look good.”⁴⁷ Savvy callers knew it was important to play the courtier, and those who did usually didn’t get dissed by Limbaugh. These flattering remarks, laid lovingly before Rush’s feet, seemed to serve as “sacrificial offerings to win acceptance and entry” into the “discursive kingdom” presided over by the great professor.⁴⁸

Of course, Limbaugh was a conservative activist, and it was his politics and their effect on national discourse—and national elections—that have received the most attention. But let’s remember that his listeners were primarily male, with one study claiming that his core, diehard audience was as much as three-quarters male.⁴⁹ Another study reported that nearly one-third of all men listened to Limbaugh at least sometimes, compared to only 13% of all women. It wasn’t necessarily true that women hated Limbaugh—although clearly many did—but they just didn’t tune in.⁵⁰

What did Limbaugh offer these men, in addition to an on-air Elderhostel and forum for conservative views? Limbaugh was a gender activist, an ideological soldier in the war to reassert patriarchy, to reclaim things as they “ought to be.” He himself lamented the state of masculinity in the 1990s: “On the one hand, we want men who are sensitive and crying, like Alan Alda, and then, after so much of that, women finally get tired of wimps and say, ‘We want real men again!’ O.K., so now we gotta change, we’ve got to go back to tough guys, we’re not gonna take any shit. And our memories tell us, we go back to high school, look at who the girls went for—the assholes! The mean, dirty, greasy sons of bitches.”⁵¹ The ads on the show, for hair loss products, memory enhancers, and health care organizations that seek to prevent heart attacks, impart a worried subtext about emasculation that can, and must, be reversed.

But Limbaugh was more than a throwback. He personified a new kind of 1990s man, the antithesis of the allegedly New Age, sensitive, feminized kind of guy. Real men didn’t eat quiche; they had a point of view and voiced it. Yet, interestingly, Limbaugh deftly *did* blend “feminine” traits into his persona, because he gave men permission to get passionate about politics. Here was a man who was emotionally unchecked—at times hysterical—yet simultaneously reasonable, combative, and avowedly antifeminist.

To put it bluntly, Limbaugh was a male hysteric. So were other male talk show hosts. This was not the persona of the organization man who keeps his lip zipped, goes along with institutional idiocy because his boss says to, and keeps his own reactions in check. This is not some Dilbert forced to seethe in silence in his cubicle. No, this man got outraged, his naturally deep voice shooting up an octave as he denounced something he thought didn't make a lick of sense. Limbaugh, and many of his fellow hosts, attacked post-Vietnam, media, and corporate versions of masculinity; they attacked what Christopher Lasch had labeled in the late 1970s the narcissistic personality, the bureaucratic operator desperately dependent on the approval of others who learns how to wear a variety of amiable masks to get by.

There was no equivocation here, no “on one hand, on the other hand,” no genial, get-along stance. Here real men had a point of view. Through their phone calls and faxes, their radio activism, they could still “ride to the rescue, and be saviors,” as host Mark Harrison put it.⁵² They also had passion. Rush lost it on the air—not totally, not in a way that was out of control—but he was a man who became easily exasperated and said so. It was this delicately calibrated balance between letting go and holding on that staked out the male hysteric as not just a reasonable but enviable persona, a man more authentic, more in touch with the connection between his feelings and his ideas than circumscribed TV reporters or political spin doctors. Feminist-bashing is essential to Limbaugh—he frequently gives “feminist updates” on the movement’s alleged idiocies. If masculinity has to be recuperated on a regular basis, especially for a guy who is a male hysteric, then it is crucial to combine feminist bashing with your own more emotionally varied (dare I say more “feminine”) performances.

On talk radio in the 1980s and '90s, masculinity was constructed as a hybrid, a fusion of traditionally “male” and “female” traits. Boys were supposed to be boys, meaning white, heterosexual boys—horny, outspoken, brash, impolite, rude, combative—who regarded women as sex objects, people of color as inferiors, and disabled people as jokes. But whether these jocks had long flowing hair or got overly emotional on the air, they were also gender poachers, recuperating masculinity at the end of the century by infusing it with the need to chat, the need to confess insecurities, the need to be hysterical and overwrought about politics, the need to make the personal political. Masculinity had become too fake, too bland, too corporate, too manufactured, too much of a processed masquerade, they suggested—let the testosterone flow, and male authenticity will follow.

This discourse about masculinity was—and is—embedded in a deeply conservative political discourse about the nation’s need for discipline, responsibility, strength, and “tough love.” Liberal models for achieving social justice were wrong, these guys suggested, because they were coded as feminine: too nurturing, too compassionate, too weak. Since masculinity has, from the beginning,

been a central component of America's identity as a nation, this particular fusion of gender and politics on talk radio was hardly inconsequential. Talk radio's attacks on Clinton as being, in part, too pussy-whipped and too soft, indecisive, and feminized played an important role in pushing Clinton further to the right and marginalizing feminist politics in the 1980s and '90s. But under talk radio's working-Joe, regular-guy populism also lurked class antagonisms about which class of men deserved access to the mike. It was men who were facile with words, who were skilled at using words as weapons, whose linguistic one-upmanship got proved day in and day out who got to be the leaders. In other words, gender politics, in which all us guys are in it together against "them," loudly and brilliantly disguised the class politics that truly divided the men from the boys.

So it's not just that Stern, Limbaugh, and their ilk were and are vulgar loudmouths who coarsen public discourse. They and talk radio were major players in the ongoing national struggle about what America is and should be, which gender codes it should embody as a nation, and what the connection between gender politics and national politics should be. While it is essential that we keep taking Limbaugh on for his antifeminist attacks, I hope you will feel free to use the term "male hysteric" when referring to Rush. Because as much as he deplores feminism, his politics and his carefully crafted gender-poaching persona would be nowhere without the second wave. It is this hybridization of gender, and what that means for national and international politics, that I hope will remain a central area of inquiry for American studies.

Notes

1. Mike Barnicle, "Allow Stern to Be Stupid," *Boston Globe*, 13 Jan. 1994: 25.
2. Kurtz, *Hot Air* 259.
3. Wayne Munson, *All Talk*, 93.
4. "Talk Show Democracy," *CQ Researcher*, 29 Apr. 1994: 375.
5. Howard Kurtz, *Hot Air: All Talk, All the Time* (New York: Times Books, 1996), 257.
6. *Statistical Abstracts of the United States: 1996* (Washington: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996), 565.
7. Munson 42.
8. Richard Corliss, "Look Who's Talking," 24.
9. Chaney 100.
10. Michael Harrison, interview, 20 June 1997.
11. Munson 114.
12. "Audiences Love to Hate Them," *Time*, 9 July 1984: 80-81.
13. Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (New York: Free, 1996), 294.
14. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP 1993)
15. See Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*.
16. Mark Williams, interview, 20 June 1997.
17. Murray Levin, *Talk Radio and the American Dream* (New York: Lexington, 1987) xiii.
18. Cited in Levin, 4-5.
19. Levin 16.

20. Levin 27, 147.
21. For a detailed discussion see Patricia Aufderheide, "After the Fairness Doctrine: Controversial Broadcast Programming and the Public Interest," *Journal of Communication* 40, (1990): 47-72.
22. "Talk Show Democracy," *CQ Researcher*, 29 Apr. 1994: 364.
23. Margaret Carlson, "My Dinner with Rush," *Time* 23 Jan. 1995: 26.
24. Howard Fineman, "The Power of Talk," *Newsweek* 8 Feb. 1993: 25.
25. Richard Zoglin, "Bugle Boys of the Airwaves," *Time* 15 May 1989: 88.
26. "The Power of Talk Radio," *Newsweek* 8 Feb. 1993.
27. Corliss, "Look Who's Talking," 22-24.
28. Interview, Jim Casale, 21 June 1997.
29. Interview, Mark Williams, 20 June 1997.
30. Richard Turner, "An Ear for the CBS Eye," 59.
31. Jeanie Kasindorf, "Bad Mouth," *New York Magazine*, 23 Nov. 1992: 43.
32. Kurtz, *Hot Air* 274.
33. Kurtz, *Hot Air* 274.
34. Cited in Kasindorf, "Bad Mouth,"; Richard Zoglin, "Shock Jock," *Time*, 30 Nov. 1992, 72-73; Kurtz, 275.
35. Biographical material on Imus from Dinitia Smith, "Morning Mouth," *New York Magazine*, 24 June 1991: 28-35; and Kurtz, *Hot Air* 278-83.
36. Dinitia Smith, "Morning Mouth," 30.
37. Dinitia Smith, "Morning Mouth," 30.
38. Smith, "Morning Mouth," 31; Ken Auletta, "The Don," *The New Yorker*, 25 May 1998: 59.
39. Kurtz, *Hot Air*: 283.
40. "Sacred and Profane," *The New Yorker*, 21 Dec. 1992: 47.
41. Marsh Center Focus Groups, 28 Jan. 1997.
42. Peter J. Boyer, "Bull Rush," *Vanity Fair*, May 1992, 205.
43. Boyer, 206.
44. Knight and Barker, 10-11.
45. Knight and Barker, 12, 14, 15-16.
46. Cited in Knight and Barker, 3.
47. Kurtz, *Hot Air*.
48. Paddy Scannel, 129.
49. Knight and Barker, 10.
50. Knight and Barker, 10.
51. Cited in Boyer, "Bull Rush," 208.
52. Interview, Mark Harrison, 20 June 1997.

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CHAPTER 24**RADIO'S DIGITAL FUTURE****Preserving the Public Interest in the Age of New Media**

Michael P. McCauley

AS A RADIO JOURNALIST TURNED EDUCATOR, I've always been suspicious of the media attention that typically accompanies the rollout of any new broadcasting technology. "Content is king," I would say to myself, fearing that the business I know and love might turn into a techno-utopian nightmare where every newsroom had all the latest electronic toys but deployed them at the expense of good content. Obviously, the practice of radio news has changed rapidly in the last few years, forcing Luddites such as myself to embrace new technologies and harness them for the purpose of producing even better news stories and audio documentaries.

I first got a taste of digital things to come in 1996 and 1997, while anchoring and reporting for a large public radio system in the Midwest. The introduction of digital audio tape (DAT), which offered a compact, convenient way to replay archived programs that were formerly stored on large reels of conventional audio tape, didn't raise many eyebrows. But one evening I noticed a new computer in the studio—and also noticed our chief engineer standing nearby, smiling. I was about to enter the world of the tapeless studio, where programs are stored on hard drives and called up for replay with the touch of a virtual button. Shortly before I left this position, the flagship station of this regional network positioned itself to go completely tapeless by purchasing an expensive integrated system for digital audio editing, word processing, and wire copy retrieval.

Upon arrival at my new academic position, I soon became acquainted—by necessity—with other digital technologies. The student radio station, which I helped manage, had already begun playing promos and public service announce-

ments from minidisc, the miniature CD format that stores up to seventy-four minutes of content on a disc that fits comfortably into a shirt pocket. Dissatisfied with our current technology for broadcasting live music, we beefed up the station's DAT equipment. Indeed, recording live performances and editing them with great precision on our new digital audio workstation made them sound "better than live." Problems of signal interference with other electronic equipment on campus forced us to relocate the station's tower and transmitter. On the advice of our chief engineer, we installed a digital studio-to-transmitter (STL) link to improve the quality of our signal and to help the station get ready for a complete digital makeover. Finally, the student managers wondered if they could stream our coverage of two regional NCAA hockey tournament games over the Internet. Our campus technical staff gladly set up the connection and, much to everyone's surprise, we got more than 360 hits over the period of two evenings—with no advance publicity.

These changes happened at near mind-boggling pace over a two-year period, and recent technical developments will lead to even more changes in the way hands-on broadcasters practice their craft. Initial fears aside, most people agree these new technologies will vastly improve the production capabilities of radio stations, streamline the delivery of audio products from the idea stage through the actual broadcast, and deliver programs to audience members with static-free, CD-quality sound. Positive as these developments are in the short term, it would be unwise for radio broadcasters and interested scholars to overlook the potential long-term impacts of the digital revolution—both good and bad. Many questions remain about the future of radio as we know it—real people, broadcasting live from local stations, with content that matters to local residents.

Digital systems inside the studio imply the eventual use of digital *transmission* technologies that transcend the problems of interference and degradation from which analog signals inevitably suffer. But how will these technologies affect the listener? More important, how far will they go toward helping American broadcasters better approach the "public interest" standard under which all stations ostensibly operate? This essay is an attempt to answer these questions and others, and to demystify the array of new technologies that will confront the radio consumer now, and in the very near future. The focus in the paragraphs that follow will not be on the "in-studio" technologies listed above, as they have already been deployed in a critical mass of radio stations throughout the country. Rather, the focus will be on technologies for the transmission of digital audio signals. Terrestrial digital audio broadcasting (DAB), satellite-based digital audio radio services (DARS), and Internet radio sites will first compete with, and then displace, the brand of analog radio broadcasting that citizens of industrialized nations have known since the 1920s. The stakes in this race to open up new audio venues are quite high, and as one might imagine, the players involved are busily maneuvering behind the scenes for future primacy.

After outlining the contours of the new digital transmission systems, I will assess how well they might perform in relation to today's form of radio broadcasting in terms of both signal quality and service to audiences. Finally, I will examine the possibility that these technologies might also provide space on the electromagnetic spectrum for noncommercial content whose aim is to render public service—to serve listeners who conceive of themselves as *citizens* rather than *consumers*. Understanding this distinction is crucial to an understanding of American radio broadcasting, whose stations are nominally mandated to serve in “the public interest, convenience and necessity” (Witherspoon and Kovitz 4). Commercial broadcasters, with their own economic interpretation of the term “public interest,” have dominated the spectrum since the time of AT&T's first experiment with advertising support in 1922. Nonprofit educational broadcasters offered an alternative to commercially driven programming, yet these and other radio reformers were subsequently excluded from effective participation in the broadcast spectrum for the next fifty years. The commercial radio lobby, working in concert with sympathetic congressmen and regulators, saw to it that most nonprofit broadcasters were relegated to time-share arrangements on marginal frequencies. They were later moved to the FM band—well before many Americans had FM receivers (McChesney, *Telecommunications* 20–27; Barnouw 122; Witherspoon and Kovitz 6–10).

In the late 1920s and early 1930s various groups of broadcast reformers agitated against the growing dominance of commercial interests in American radio. Briefly, these groups sensed that radio content backed by commercial sponsorship would soon be dominated by the discourse of sales and marketing, and that important normative goals such as the provision of quality news, public affairs, and educational programs would fall by the wayside. These critics anticipated concerns about America's dominant commercial broadcasting system that persist today, namely, that for-profit broadcasters treat audience members as mere consumers who might please the station's sponsors by parting with a bit of their hard-earned cash. Stations that follow this path may well pad their bank accounts, but in the process they also cripple their own ability to stimulate listener involvement in community affairs—the very essence of citizenship (Hoynes 35–37; McChesney, “Public” 10–11; Brown 103–7). With the coming change to digital broadcast technologies, then, it is incumbent upon media scholars to revisit the public interest standard and to see whether technical advances in radio will be capable of providing listeners with something like an electronic public sphere—a salon or coffeehouse of the airwaves.

Digital Transmission Technologies

The central principle for the move toward digital radio is the notion that analog broadcasting, the traditional transmission of electromagnetic waves through the

atmosphere, will give way to the encoding of audio signals in digital, or binary, form. The radio signal of the future will be actually a series of high-speed “snapshots” of the original audio content, encoded, transmitted, and received as a stream of 0s and 1s—much like the internal language that computers use. If digital signals are encoded and distributed in precise numerical fashion, the reception of those signals will entail a clear, unmistakable replication of the original broadcast. The second major principle at work here is that of *convergence*, the notion that once encoded, any digital content—from radio stations, computers, video sources, and so on—is theoretically interchangeable with content produced on other platforms. Thus the digital revolution is already spawning many novel means of audio reception: music and talk shows on the Internet, “boom-boxes with browsers” (Pizzi, “Boombox”), and car radios that also display certain visual images, to name a few. In this section I will briefly detail the ways in which each of the developing digital audio transmission technologies works, in terms of delivering a high-quality signal to audiences.

Terrestrial Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB)

The concept of DAB was first developed in 1981 at the Institut für Rundfunktechnik—a research center in Munich, Germany—and refined after 1987 when a consortium of thirty-eight European companies began to develop and market the transmission system known as Eureka 147 (“Frequently” 6; “NAB Backs” 6). This system, which has since become the standard in many parts of the world, offers CD-quality sound, improvements in tuning, and the capability for broadcasting other data (e.g., song titles, traffic information, weather warnings) besides the traditional radio signal. The creators of this system note that it overcomes one vexing problem with traditional FM signals, multipath interference. Anyone who listens to the radio while driving is all too familiar with this problem, which manifests itself as occasional hisses and pops. Multipath interference is created when the primary FM signal bounces off buildings, trees, or hills and enters a radio receiver in competition with overlapping, reflected signals. Eureka 147 engineers overcame this problem by making technical adjustments on both the transmitting and receiving ends of the broadcasting process (“Frequently” 2, 4–5).

Some four hundred digital audio broadcasters around the world use the Eureka 147 system at present, and they have a potential audience of more than 230 million people (“Did You Know?” 1). In Great Britain the BBC has been broadcasting with such a system since September 1995; it was joined in November 1999 by Digital One, a commercial venture that has now become the single largest DAB broadcaster in the world (“Country” 14–15). Canada has also jumped on the Eureka bandwagon by launching DAB services in five cities, including Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. CBC stations in these markets are distributing ancillary data through the Eureka system, including graphical men-

tion of song titles and artists, and CBC/Toronto has also begun streaming news, weather, and program schedules through this new service (Stimson 4).

Eureka 147 burst onto the scene in the United States in early 1991, when the Radio Board of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) voted unanimously to endorse the system. The NAB originally wanted the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to designate Eureka as the official US standard for DAB transmission, and also developed plans for the association's profit-making arm to license the technology to American stations for a fee ("NAB Backs" 6). Though Eureka was the only operating DAB system at the time—and, by all accounts, functioned very well—a collection of radio station group owners soon expressed concern over the Radio Board's actions. The chief complaint voiced by industry insiders has been that the Eureka system, which relies on the allocation of new portions of the electromagnetic spectrum, would bring new broadcasters into direct competition with existing commercial operators. Radio industry officials have cited several other reasons for the sudden about-face on Eureka, including spectrum scarcity, the prospect of consumer confusion, and the possibility that American technology firms might want to develop other, competing DAB systems ("DAB" 43–44; Lambert 10; US, FCC *Comments* 19–23). But at the bottom of all these rationales lie three primal fears: that a "new spectrum" radio system would undermine the high market values enjoyed by many analog stations; that this potential for devaluation would hamper the ability of station owners to profit by purchasing and selling radio properties; and that any reallocation of spectrum to new broadcasters (i.e., competitors) would, by definition, be a bad allocation (Masters 85–86; Leanza 10).¹

As the Eureka proposal fell apart in the United States, a new company entered the scene with another proposal for a DAB standard. USA Digital Radio (USADR) was formed as a partnership of the Gannett and CBS/Westinghouse media empires, both of which have amassed powerful holdings in the US broadcasting industry ("NAB Amenable" 6).² This company's product represents an in-band, on-channel (IBOC) approach to the coming digital audio conversion. An IBOC system would not require a new spectrum allocation, as would the Eureka system; instead, it would allow any present-day broadcaster to deploy a new, compressed signal at the upper and lower edges of its current frequency allocation, while simultaneously broadcasting the old analog signal from the center of that same piece of spectrum.³ In theory, the manufacturers of IBOC-compatible radio transmitters and receivers could minimize the financial pain of the digital transition by permitting the broadcast of both analog and digital signals until the time when a critical mass of Americans purchases new digital-only sets. If IBOC becomes the digital audio standard in this country, each existing AM and FM broadcaster would continue to use the same frequency allocation, with the eventual goal of a full digital conversion several years down the road (Lambert 10; Smith, Wright, and Ostroff 10–11, 25–26).

Until recently USADR and Lucent Digital Radio were competitors in the race to define an IBOC DAB standard for the United States. Spurred on by competition from other technologies, these two companies announced a merger in July 2000. The formation of iBiquity Digital Corporation may, according to company officials, enable consumers to purchase DAB receivers for in-car use by late 2001. iBiquity also claims the merger will one day enable the delivery of IBOC-based digital audio to cell phones and personal digital assistants such as the PalmPilot (“Lucent Technologies” 3; “Lucent Digital Radio” 1; “Lucent Merges” 1).

Besides the support of Lucent Technologies’ Bell Labs, iBiquity is backed by an impressive array of investors including fifteen of the nation’s top twenty radio broadcasting groups. Even before the merger, USADR could claim that its investors operated more than two thousand radio stations, served thousands of other affiliate stations, beamed signals to a potential audience of more than 110 million people, and took in nearly half of all radio industry revenues in the United States (“USA” 1; see also note 1). In August 2000 iBiquity further enhanced its financial prospects by securing a commitment by Visteon, the world’s second largest supplier of automotive components and integrated systems, to invest in its operations (“Visteon” 1).

The IBOC standard proposed by iBiquity will use a data compression technology known as Perceptual Audio Coding (PAC). Developed and patented by Lucent, this algorithm is heralded as the highest-quality compression system in the industry, with some observers predicting it will eventually supplant MP3 as the technology of choice for those who download digitally encoded music (“Lucent Technologies” 2; “Let’s Make” 1). While iBiquity’s adoption of PAC is a positive development, some fear it could lead to an unfortunate technological trade-off. Because Lucent will already contribute PAC to the new company’s technological mix, it may be forced to give up another of its own developments, namely, an interference-reduction technology known as multistreaming. This technology splinters a broadcaster’s digital signal into four parts, so three of those parts, for example, could add up to a usable signal if one digital stream fails. This technology would also enable a station to simultaneously program different content on analog and digital signals, as long as the analog transmission system remains in use. On the other hand, USADR’s system requires the simulcasting of programs in analog and digital formats; if the digital signal fails, the station would simply revert to the analog signal. This technology allows for qualitative improvements in radio broadcasting but also cuts down on the potential number of new signals in the digital era (Janssen). If a public radio station used USADR’s interference reduction technology, for example, that station would be prevented from using its current frequency allocation to “stream a digital music channel and an analog news channel” at the same time—something that would be attractive to broadcasters who place a premium on maximizing public service content (5).

These technical choices aside, most observers agree the creation of iBiquity Digital Corporation will hasten the acceptance of an IBOC DAB standard. If and when an IBOC DAB standard is accepted by the FCC, industry officials are confident that fifty top-market stations will soon offer digital signals, with radio sets capable of receiving them hitting the market about a year later (US FCC, *Comments* 25–26; Masters 85). In spite of these rosy predictions, others who have followed the circuitous development of this technology feel the political squabbling that has delayed its deployment by at least a decade may have already mired the terrestrial DAB industry in a position of competitive disadvantage. One critic calls IBOC “a business and allocation plan in search of technology,” and says it is sure to fail if a simulcast-only system is chosen (Pizzi, “What’s Wrong”). This observation may have merit, as a new, competitive force—one that promises to bypass the traditional radio broadcasting system entirely—will enter the fray very shortly.

Digital Audio Radio Service (DARS)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s several American companies formed for the purpose of delivering digital audio content directly to motorists and other users through methods entirely different from terrestrial broadcasting. Two firms are worthy of special mention. David Margolese, a Canadian telecommunications executive, and Robert Briskman, an engineer and manager with COMSAT, formed Satellite CD Radio in 1989 for the purpose of developing a cablelike audio service for motorists. The other firm, American Mobile Radio Corporation, formed in 1992 to develop its own technologies for piping satellite-based audio content into cars and homes.

Both companies have matured in recent years, with each realizing a series of technical breakthroughs and reinventing itself with a new corporate name and image. In 1992 Satellite CD Radio, now known as Sirius Satellite Radio, and American Mobile Radio, now called XM Satellite Radio, petitioned the FCC to allocate new swaths of spectrum for their services (Sukow 42). Both services achieved their goal in a spring 1997 spectrum auction. Sirius, which paid \$83.3 million for its portion of the satellite radio spectrum, has since launched three satellites and has been developing terrestrial repeater station to help ensure coverage in America’s “steel canyons”—those urban areas where audio signals are often blocked by tall buildings and other structures. Sirius began experimental broadcasts from its new 100,000-square-foot digital facility in New York’s Rockefeller Center in early 2001 (“DARS Winners” 9; “Sirius Radio Sets” 1; “At a Glance” 1; “Sirius Radio Completes In-Orbit” 1; “Sirius Radio Completes Satellite”).

XM, which paid \$89.8 million for its chunk of spectrum,¹ launched both of its satellites in early 2001, and was scheduled to begin broadcasts from its new

150,000-square-foot facility in Washington, DC later in the year (Pizzi, "S-DARS Update" 2; White, B13; "XM to Launch" 1). Both services will target listeners who are dissatisfied with the heavy commercial loads on many stations in recent years and with a perceived lack of content diversity (Taylor, "Digital" 2). Their success will depend on the willingness of commuters, truck drivers, and RV users to foot the bill for new satellite radio receivers. Each company has already struck deals with receiver manufacturers and with automakers who plan to install these sets in certain new car models (Akasie 1; White B13). Though it's impossible to give a precise figure, some observers peg the initial cost of a new satellite radio receiver at \$200. A subscription to the actual audio service will cost about \$10 per month; both expenses will likely be structured into the regular packages of financing available through car dealerships (White B13). In order to become profitable, XM feels it must gain 2 million subscribers by the year 2003. Sirius thinks its product will turn a profit one year later if 1.7 million motorists obtain new radio sets and purchase its monthly service (Curran 26; Akasie 56).

Many commercial radio operators in the United States have objected vehemently to the introduction of satellite-based radio services. NAB officials claimed in 1995 that satellite radio would hamper the diversification of radio ownership, undermine traditional broadcasters' ability to serve local audiences, and flout the long-cherished (though seldom well defined) concept of broadcasting "in the public interest" ("NAB—DAB" 4). Most of these claims have serious flaws, as we shall see in a moment. The real anxiety shared by many of today's radio operators is, once again, a primal fear of competition. As the regional manager of one large radio group put it, "I dislike the idea of consumers having more options. I don't want them to have another array of competitors to choose from. I don't think that's a good thing for any local radio station" ("Contemplating" 117).

In response to such comments, officials from Sirius and XM claim their services will enhance the quality of audio programming for listeners while solving some vexing problems with the clarity and range of present-day transmissions. Again, these companies plan to specifically target people who enjoy audio content without the nuisance of heavy commercial loads. According to XM's Dave Logan:

One of the things XM and Sirius will do is attack [traditional radio broadcasters] in the place where radio is king—that is, in the car. XM's goal is to reach at least a 1 share with each of its channels. That's a substantial bite when you multiply it by 100 stations and realize we're talking about a national audience. (Qtd. in Taylor, "Digital" 86)

Both services plan to offer as many as a hundred channels of music, news, sports, and other specialty formats (Curran 26). How quickly these services catch on—if, in fact, they do—is a matter of much speculation and debate. It is difficult

to imagine a significant rollout of satellite radio receivers until enough people know about the service and are persuaded that the cost of a new set (and monthly subscription) will offer value above and beyond the product now available on AM and FM stations. In addition, it is not yet clear whether Sirius and XM will be able to develop seamless national audio "footprints" based on a relatively small number of satellites and a network of terrestrial repeaters ("Cable" 96).

Sirius and XM could well grab an important piece of the market if their satellite-based systems hit the market before traditional radio broadcasters begin sending out digital signals. But while proponents of DARS and IBOC continue the race to reach customers first, another audio upstart has already started piping its wares into American offices and homes through an entirely different pathway.

Internet Radio

If terrestrial DAB and satellite-based DARS are intricate, slow-developing technologies, Internet broadcasting is a Johnny-come-lately that, in terms of deployment and basic functionality, has already passed the other two systems by. Most Internet devotees know their favorite medium began in the late 1960s as a child of the Pentagon and that scientists—computer and otherwise—helped bring this medium to greater public visibility in the 1990s through the user-friendly graphical interface known as the World Wide Web. One could argue that Internet radio (aka Web radio, Webcasting, etc.) began in early 1994, when Rob Glaser, a former Microsoft employee, founded Progressive Networks (later RealNetworks). This company became the preeminent developer and marketer of Internet streaming technologies soon after the first edition of its RealPlayer audio software was released in 1995 ("About RealNetworks" 1). Though early versions of the software did not inspire visions of a new, more effective electronic medium—especially when used on the often-congested patch of cyberspace that is sometimes called the "World Wide Wait"—it took no more than a couple of years for industry insiders to envision a day when their services might rival traditional radio and TV.

RealNetworks remains the leader in delivery of sounds and pictures over the Web, as more than 85% of all streaming media providers used RealAudio, RealVideo, and other related applications by late 1999 ("About Real Networks" 1). The streaming industry has embraced radio content in a big way recently, with more than thirty-five hundred analog radio stations broadcasting on the Web at last count, compared to fifty-six stations in 1996 (Taylor, "NAB Convention" 3). Hundreds of other content providers run Internet-only stations with no corresponding signal on the radio spectrum. Program services such as NetRadio and Broadcast.com have used streaming technologies to attain prominent positions in the Internet world over the last five years. In spring 2000

the Portland, Maine-based BroadcastAMERICA.com claimed it had become the world's largest online broadcasting network, with exclusive contracts to Webcast programs from more than five hundred audio content providers and other deals to air programs from more than four thousand radio stations around the world ("BroadcastAMERICA" 1). Like so many "dot-com" start-ups, however, the Portland Maine-based company went belly-up soon after its pronouncements of great success. In early 2001, a bankruptcy court awarded the radio assets of BroadcastAmerica.com to a New Jersey firm, SurferNetwork.com, which had bid for those properties at auction. With this development, and another major acquisition, SurferNetwork has become the leading service provider of streaming radio content. The company expects to average about five million listening hours every month, once stations formerly contracted to other providers begin streaming with its own technology ("SurferNetwork" 1).

If these numbers sound impressive to the casual observer, they've also caught the attention of the marketers and statisticians who keep track of listenership for traditional AM and FM broadcasters. Scarborough Research claims that by February 1999 five US cities (Washington, San Francisco, Austin, Seattle/Tacoma, and Salt Lake City) achieved 50 percent Internet penetration among local adults ("Five U.S. Cities" 1). Later that year Arbitron, America's top radio research firm, released its first ratings report for Internet audio providers. The initial Webcasting "book" showed that more than nine hundred thousand listeners tuned into the 240 channels monitored in October 1999. Texas Rebel Radio, an adult album alternative service in Austin, logged nearly eighty-four thousand hits during the one-month survey period. In terms of time spent tuning (TST), the survey showed the average listener to ABC Radio's Smooth Jazz Webcasting service tuned in for nearly eight and a half hours during the same month ("Arbitron Releases First" 1). The Arbitron Webcast Ratings report in December 2000 charted audience response to more than a thousand Webcast services. Channels streamed by NetRadio occupied seven of the top ten spots in this report, and Radio Margaritaville, offering "Parrotheads" a daily dose of Jimmy Buffet songs, was ranked number 23 ("Radio Margaritaville").

One might guess the legitimacy conferred by top market research firms would position the new Web radio industry for great financial success. Indeed, recent studies cosponsored by Arbitron find that online radio listeners, or "streamies," are fast becoming a coveted market for the purveyors of consumer goods. Streamies are very responsive to online advertisements; a January 2000 study showed that 79% of online radio listeners visited Web sites advertised on their favorite radio station and that 60% of those same people have already made a purchase from a Web site. Streamies spend an average of eleven hours, fourteen minutes weekly on the Web and are quite likely to purchase books, CDs, software, travel services, and other goods online. It is hardly surprising, then, that one Arbitron official says online listeners are "worth their weight in

gold to Webcasters and advertisers targeting the Internet audience" ("Internet" 1). More than one analyst predicts that Internet radio, once coupled with "wireless" Web technologies, could lead to a significant shift in advertising revenues away from traditional AM and FM stations and toward companies formed specifically to deliver content over the Internet (McVicker 1; Saxe 1).

In early 2000 Motorola unveiled an Internet radio prototype called iRadio—a wireless receiver for automobiles that allows easy access to content originating from the Web, cell phones, satellites, AM and FM radio stations, and other sources ("Motorola Unveils" 1). iRadio and other competing receiver technologies may not hit the market until fall 2001, but GM and Ford both plan to offer Internet access in some new car models very soon (Carpenter A1). Indeed, the new industry known as telematics—wireless communications for cars and trucks—is growing rapidly on the bet that consumers will gobble up these new devices. For example, Motorola's new telematics group brought in \$200 million worth of new business during the first half of 2000 alone ("Motorola Telematics" 1). DAB and satellite radio providers are getting into the telematics business as well.

Developments such as iRadio and iPaq, a new Internet-only appliance for the home ("The Web"), will indeed hasten the delivery of digital audio content to all the traditional venues for radio listening. Before getting carried away by this initial wave of optimism, however, we must pay heed to some cautionary evidence. For one thing, Internet radio listening is not yet habitual, with only 30 percent of all Web users actually listening to music, news, or talk programs online ("Study" 1). Other points of skepticism include persistent problems with the audio quality of Webcasting services, the reliability of connection to those services, the ease of navigation toward one's favorite features, and the fact that Webcast listening is still largely confined to desktop computers in the listener's place of work (Pizzi, "Living on the Edge" 1-2).

These problems do exist, but the drive to develop technological fixes is also underway. Faster computers, new streaming technologies, and systems solutions that could help bypass the clutter of today's crowded Internet may, within a few years, begin to ease some of the problems Web radio listeners now have with low-quality, intermittent reception. Better audio player software, coupled with a new generation of browsers, should soon make the task of hooking up to your favorite Internet station quicker, easier, and more pleasant. Once these fixes are in place, the development of wireless broadband delivery systems will undoubtedly liberate Webcasting from the confines of the desktop computer.⁵

Finally, on the content delivery side of the equation, "smart technologies" such as iRadio will take some pressure off the shoulders of Internet, satellite, and DAB broadcasters, all of whom have worried about consumer acceptance of expensive receiving equipment tailored specifically for their competing transmission systems. Perhaps the prediction of one technology research group for

widespread consumer acceptance of personalized digital audio content by 2005 is not entirely far-fetched (Saxe 1).

Maintaining the Public Interest

Amid all the techno-speak and revelry surrounding new audio media, the purveyors of these technologies sometimes forget the principle that supposedly underlies American broadcasting and that should, by logical extension, underlie the coming digital revolution. The Radio Act of 1927 clearly stated that all broadcasters must serve in “the public interest, convenience, and necessity” (US Congress), but this standard has often been used and abused in ways that tend to protect the *status quo*. Over the years broadcasters in the United States have typically used the terms “public interest” and “public service” to describe the advertiser-supported fare offered by most radio and TV stations. The “service” rendered to the public under this system does entail some degree of format diversity across the nation, but those formats are typically marketed to groups of consumers who have a fair amount of money and are susceptible to advertising and the regular purchase of consumer products (Hurwitz 237–39). Explicit service to marginal demographic groups is less common, along with broadcasting that supports social justice causes—the brand of community-level radio that aims to promote citizenship through greater participation in local and national politics (Barlow 101).

To date there have been no explicit formulas for enhancing the public interest in digital audio broadcasting. No new spectrum allocation has been authorized for DAB at this point; indeed, current plans for IBOC technology—with its proposed one-for-one swap of analog and digital allocations—would not permit any additional entrants to the radio portion of the spectrum. In this sense one may find little basis for developing further public interest regulations for digital radio, for if current broadcasters have their way, the future of radio will entail, for all purposes, the same kinds of content offered by the same companies. But some experts have begun to imagine a more progressive future for the American broadcast industry as a whole. For example, we can refer to a template offered by a blue-ribbon government panel formed to study America’s conversion to digital television. The Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters was formed in October 1997. Commonly known as the Gore Commission, because of Albert Gore Jr.’s participation as titular head, the twenty-two-member panel delivered its recommendations to President Clinton in December 1998.

Some of the Gore Commission’s recommendations were crafted specifically for television, yet others could be used to fashion a program of public interest reforms for digital audio broadcasting as well. In the process of imagining radio’s digital future, then, I propose that the users of each new delivery system be

required to promote programs that are of use to citizens of a democracy—not only to those consumers who are an essential part of any capitalist economic system. Specifically, my proposal would require broadcasters to submit themselves to four normative processes: the creation and adoption of an overall set of definitive public interest standards; the adoption of policies that enhance diversity in, and access to, radio content; the adoption of measures to enhance civic discourse and political communication; and the construction of funding mechanisms to enhance broadcasting in the public interest.⁶ In the paragraphs that follow, I will further explicate these policy imperatives and see how well they square with the vision today's radio broadcasters generally hold for digital media.

Public Interest Standards

A number of advocates for better broadcasting sat on the Gore Commission but by most accounts they were overpowered by strong representatives of the commercial broadcasting lobby. Not surprisingly, the commission recommended that the NAB draft a new voluntary code of conduct. To supplement this code, members said, the FCC should adopt a set of minimum public interest requirements for digital broadcasters and require them to disclose their performance in this regard quarterly. These requirements would also apply to the ascertainment of community interests and the broadcast of public service announcements and public affairs programs.

In analyzing these suggestions, we must first note that broadcast licensees are already required to document the airing of public affairs programs that impact their communities and to make these records available for public inspection. The Gore Commission report does suggest the development of other public interest standards; in assessing the chance they will actually come to pass, however, we must note that the record of American broadcasters in fashioning effective performance guidelines is, in a word, unimpressive. The NAB did develop a self-regulatory code for radio programming and advertising in the late 1920s, issued its first television code in the early 1950s, and made periodical revisions to both codes for years afterward. These codes suggested limits on advertising and on the airing of sexual and violent content during family viewing hours. But in these matters and others, the NAB codes had no teeth (Smith, Wright, and Ostroff 463; Head et al. 359). Loaded with general shoulds and should nots, the only penalty for violating these codes was the loss of a station's right to display the NAB's seal of approval. In 1979 the Justice Department charged that recommended limits on ad time "depriv[ed] advertisers of the benefits of free and open competition," and the NAB disbanded its code-making operations altogether in 1982 (Sterling and Kittross 192–93, 334, 433–34; Head et al. 359).

The ideas embodied in other Gore Commission recommendations have also been tried and abandoned over the years. Starting in 1949 the FCC began to spell

out concrete expectations for broadcasting in the public interest. In its famous Blue Book, a primer on this very topic, the FCC listed five factors that constituted good public service: (1) a sense of “balance” in advertiser-supported material; (2) the airing of programs whose nature would make them unsupportable; (3) the serving of minority tastes and interests; (4) catering to the needs of nonprofit organizations; and (5) allowances for experimentation with new types of programs (Sterling and Kittross 304). Though many commercial broadcasters blasted the authors of the Blue Book—likening them to Communists or fascists, depending on the mood of the critic—this report, along with other legal and regulatory rulings, did evolve over the years into a narrower set of programming guidelines known as the Fairness Doctrine (Smith, Wright, and Ostroff 54–55, 445–47; Sterling and Kittross 426–27). This doctrine generally held that stations broadcasting stories about matters of public controversy should air the views of all competing interests. But the Reagan years in Washington brought an attack on the Fairness Doctrine, with champions of broadcast deregulation arguing that any such guidelines would produce a “chilling effect” on stations—resulting in the airing of no controversial material at all. The FCC, under Reagan appointee Mark Fowler, scrapped major portions of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, in spite of a lack of evidence that any chilling effect on programming actually occurred (Aufderheide 67). Also meeting its death in 1984 was the requirement that broadcasters regularly ascertain community needs as a prelude to program planning (Creech 112). One common theme underlies the gradual weakening and demise of all the program guidelines mentioned above. In each case these developments unfolded rather quietly, behind the scenes, and with little or no chance for public debate—a scenario common to all major regulatory decisions affecting US telecommunications since 1927 (see McChesney, *Rich Media* 63–67, 281).

In all likelihood the only public interest standard today’s analog broadcasters will carry over into the digital age is the public service tally the NAB now computes each year from member station data. At its spring 2000 national convention, the powerful trade group reported that American radio and TV stations contributed the equivalent of more than \$8.1 billion in public service efforts from August 1998 through July 1999. NAB president Edward Fritts claimed these contributions include “the dollar value of airtime local broadcasters devoted to public service announcements (PSAs), in addition to money raised for charity, needy individuals and disaster relief and prevention efforts.” Fritts added that the \$8.1 billion figure is conservative, because it does not include the value of airtime donated for news coverage, breaking weather emergencies, and off-air charitable services (Brilliant 1).

Doubtless most radio and television stations behave like other American businesses in terms of contributions to the United Way and other charitable causes. It is also undeniable that public service announcements include prosocial messages designed to raise awareness about AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse,

family violence, and other important problems ("Broadcasters"). But the method the NAB uses for calculating the amount of donated services is questionable, to say the least. First, the statewide data collected and fed to the NAB come from surveys that exhibit a low response rate, especially where radio stations are concerned. Data from stations that do respond are then used to project statewide figures that cannot logically be derived from the information supplied. Nowhere in these survey reports can one find the precise method through which the opportunity cost of running public service announcements is calculated; this method should be open to scrutiny, as PSAs are most often run at off-peak times that would not warrant the use of high figures for the potential loss of advertising dollars ("Executive Summary"; McConnell). Finally, it is also worth noting that the NAB's template for conducting public service research was developed and administered by Public Opinion Strategies of Alexandria, Virginia, a Republican "political and public affairs survey research company" that, among other things, conducted research for the infamous "Harry and Louise" TV commercials—the ads that helped destroy Hillary Clinton's plans for health care reform ("Partner"). The Web site for this firm touts its expertise in "combat message development—the science of creating effective messages for issues in which the opposing side is aggressively engaged" ("Overview"). Aside from these dubious qualifications, the work of Public Opinion Strategies has been challenged by two other studies of local public service broadcasting—one by the Media Access Project (MAP) and the Benton Foundation in 1998, and the other by a professor in Fordham University's Graduate School of Business Administration in 2000. Both studies show that local public affairs programs—including coverage of ongoing issues of public debate, minidocumentaries, panels, roundtables, and extended coverage—"made up less than one half of one percent of the fare offered by commercial [TV] broadcasters" in the markets studied. The Fordham study, based on randomly sampled markets and stations, showed consistent results regardless of competitive conditions, market demographics, and individual station characteristics. The MAP/Benton study, with a sample designed to reflect all market sizes and diverse geographic locations, showed that 35% of TV stations had no local news, while 25% had no local public affairs programming whatsoever ("Action Alert" 2; "What's Local").

Diversity and Access

The Gore Commission report implies that broadcasters should seize the opportunities inherent in digital radio technology to substantially enhance program diversity. Accordingly, any new audio service should provide programs targeting audiences that lie outside the socioeconomic mainstream. At least some new audio services must reach out to groups of listeners who may not initially be able to afford a particular delivery platform or subscription-based program service.

Finally, broadcasters should take full advantage of digital technologies to promote the expansion of quality service to Americans with disabilities.

Theoretically, the coming digital conversion could provide more avenues for enhancing diversity in broadcast content and greater access to that same content. Many public radio stations already use portions of their existing satellite relay streams to operate “radio reader” services for the blind, and also offer Web sites for the streaming, archiving, and playback of listeners’ favorite programs. In terms of new efforts, Sirius Satellite Radio has formed an alliance with We Media to develop talk shows, entertainment programs, and other featured programming for people with disabilities, their families and friends (“Sirius Satellite” 1). And Webcast audiences will also be able to hear some formats that are not currently available on many local radio stations, such as Black Gospel Radio and Pet Owner Radio (“BGN” 1; “Purina” 1).

At first glance it seems that traditional analog broadcasters would also be able to continue the proliferation of niche formats in recent years during their changeover to digital transmission. A 1999 report by the Katz Radio Group identified no fewer than forty-five narrowcast formats, ranging from the standard Contemporary Hit, Country and News/Talk to newer forms called Churban, Hot/Young Country, and Rock Talk (“Understanding”). In spite of these developments, those who analyze the radio industry know that most stations will likely program one of five or six major format types—Country, Adult Contemporary, Religious/Gospel, Rock, Top 40, or News/Talk (Duncan 3; Shane 3–6). And regardless of format, commercial music services will likely continue to program in a way that values the guidance of consultants and other industry insiders over input from local audiences (Rothenbuhler 229–30). It is sobering to note that today’s programming practices in the United States have actually caused radio listenership to drop by 12 percent since 1990. Analyst James Duncan of Duncan’s American Radio blames this state of affairs partly on the heavy commercial loads found on the most popular stations; he also cites a lack of program innovation, saying today’s “new sounds” have actually been conceived by slicing old formats into pieces, rather than airing new styles and combinations of music (Duncan 2–3). Finally, although the amount of time devoted to news on US radio stations is rising slightly, researchers also report a trend toward newsroom consolidation—one set of journalists serving more than one group-owned station in the same city (“1999”). This artifact of deregulation in the 1990s points toward a loss of voice diversity in many radio newsrooms; other observers also note that many group-owned radio stations are now “outsourcing” their news function to MetroNetworks or ShadowNews—both owned by the CBS/Infinity radio family (Burch 19; Shane 6).

Regarding access to digital radio content, the picture is equally discouraging. When asked about the place of public service broadcasting in the radio spectrum, now and in the future, current broadcasters contend they should not

be forced to serve potentially unprofitable demographic segments. Milford K. Smith Jr., who chairs the DAB Subcommittee of the National Radio Systems Committee (a group sponsored jointly by the NAB and the Electronic Industries Foundation), argues that Internet radio is the place for minorities and other underserved groups to “seek mass distribution of their product” (Smith 29–30). But attorney Cheryl Leanza of the Media Access Project bristles at Smith’s suggestions, categorizing them as part of a “let them eat internet” argument that ignores America’s present digital divide. “Many communities who are disenfranchised either because of cultural or economic reasons . . . are not familiar with computer technology, are not comfortable with computer technology,” says Leanza. “Radio technology, on the other hand . . . is a familiar technology. People have radios all over the world. If they’re immigrants to this country, they understand radio. So it’s much more accessible socially and economically” (5).

Leanza links the NAB’s distaste for providing terrestrial radio service to groups of people with “undesirable” socioeconomic profiles to a larger policy objective that would keep any newly opened portions of the electromagnetic spectrum out of the reach of nonmembers (10). Whatever the case, Internet use among low-income groups is quite low (Walsh 2; Johnston 1), as is the likelihood these people will become early adopters of Web- or satellite-based radio technologies. Internet use among most nonwhite groups—at home and work, in schools and libraries—is rising but has not yet passed the 50 percent mark. More than 25% of African-American households live on less than \$15,000 per year; accordingly, Internet usage among this group lags even further behind (Walsh 2–3). For all these reasons, it is hard to imagine how access to quality audio content in the digital age would be much better than it is now.

Civic Discourse and Political Communication

The coming digital conversion should eventually bring the era of simple one-way broadcasting to an end. Tomorrow’s radio operators should feature conversation that transcends tightly controlled talk formats and affords audience members real opportunities to join in. On the political front, broadcasters should do their part to enhance the positive use of radio during electoral races; specifically, the radio industry should voluntarily provide five minutes each night for candidate-centered discourse in the thirty-day period before an election.

Some radio operators with a presence on the Web already provide content designed to foster civic discourse and political participation. For example, NPR Online developed an Election 2000 site linked to the network’s home page. This site features the top political headlines of the day along with audio clips, recaps of the major political conventions, candidate profiles listed by party (including the Green, Libertarian, Natural Law, and Reform Parties), discussion sites, a resource center and links to relevant NPR coverage (“NPR’s” 1) Likewise,

Minnesota Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Broadcasting have developed sites that include poll results, conversations with leading candidates, and analyses of debates and campaign ads (“Campaign;” “Wisconsin”). Another innovative use of the Internet comes from the commercial sector. Working Assets Broadcasting—whose parent company promotes political activism and donations to progressive nonprofit organizations—has launched a service called RadioForChange. Based at KWAB-FM, a progressive commercial radio station in Boulder, Colorado, this Web-based simulcast service features hosts and commentators such as Laura Flanders, formerly of the media watchdog group FAIR, and Jim Hightower, the syndicated political gadfly whose humorous diatribes serve to elevate “the little guy.” RadioForChange serves people who feel their voices have become lost in the current sea of conservative talk shows and distant media conglomerates (“About RadioForChange”).

These developments are certainly positive in terms of creating electronic public spaces for citizens to gather information and share concerns. But their future success is contingent upon the wider availability of Web technology to people in remote locations and lower income groups. In terms of traditional broadcasters and their plans for civic and political conversation in the digital era, we need only look at the Gore Commission’s efforts to formulate a program of free airtime for candidates to become dismayed about the prospects for success. Robert McChesney notes that “to extract even a recommendation for a voluntary five-minute-per-night commitment of free time for candidates in the month preceding an election, the Gore Commission recommended that broadcasters be permitted to raise their ad rates for political commercials beyond the rates then legally permissible” (McChesney, *Rich* 157). If democratic uses of our broadcast media have a price, members of the Gore Commission were certainly not willing to ante up.

Funding

Digital radio broadcasters who use portions of their former analog allocations for services aside from the main broadcast channel, and in so doing reap enhanced economic benefits, should have the flexibility to choose between paying a fee, providing a channel for public interest purposes, or making an in-kind contribution. Also, Congress should create a trust fund to ensure enhanced and permanent funding for public broadcasting, to help it fulfill its potential in the digital radio environment, and to remove it from the vicissitudes of the political process.

First of all, we must repeat that the prevailing IBOC DAB standard would preclude the opening of any new channels for digital audio broadcasting—for public service or any other purpose. Second, as we have already seen, the NAB argues that its members already do quite enough in the area of public service.

These developments aside, there seems little hope that our future digital broadcasting system will be structured around any imperatives other than those of ratings success, advertising revenue and programming for economically attractive demographic groups. It's not that broadcasters can't afford to fund more public service efforts, the kind detailed in the FCC's Blue Book. In 1997 alone the American radio industry posted revenues of more than \$13.6 billion; at the same time, the owners of radio stations paid only \$9.3 million for their use of the airwaves in terms of regulatory fees, and another few million in license application fees (US CBO). All told, then, radio operators paid a tiny fraction of their gross revenues in 1997—probably less than 1%—for the right to stay in business. These figures show that commercial radio broadcasters clearly can afford to support noncommercial programming as part of their public interest obligations. Considering the profitability of the radio industry and current estimates of a large federal budget surplus, one broadcast reform group has suggested the creation of a Public Broadcasting Trust (PBT) to support noncommercial programming in perpetuity. Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting argues that a 2% annual spectrum usage fee, coupled with small taxes on the sale of digital TV sets, the sale or transfer of commercial broadcast licenses, broadcast advertising revenues, and the proceeds of spectrum auctions, would produce a sufficient amount of money to create the PBT, which would replace the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (Starr 276–79).

A poll conducted in December 1998 showed that 79% of the American public favored a plan that would have commercial broadcasters pay 5 percent of their revenues into such a trust fund ("CIPB"). If proposals such as this one come to pass, public broadcasting could remove itself from dependency on the federal government and corporate sponsors. Unfortunately, the creation of a Public Broadcasting Trust is politically impossible at the moment. The idea has been floated for many years in Washington and even came close to fruition in the 1990s; yet the federal government, commercial broadcasters, and public broadcasters themselves have thus far been unable to agree on the source and amount of seed money (Witherspoon and Kovitz 49–50, 86–88, 110–11).

In summary, we can find a few promising pockets of programming at the edges of today's radio industry—program sources that will be mapped directly onto the worlds of satellite and Internet radio and, perhaps, terrestrial DAB. Fundamental change in the prevailing definition of public interest or public service broadcasting, however, seems no closer than it was in the 1930s. Self-regulation has, over the years, conferred a sense of benevolence on the nation's largely commercial broadcasting system. Yet even a novice economist can see that self-regulation in any industry most often involves weak preemptive measures by firms whose fear of economic loss is most acute. These realities, and the inability of the Gore Commission to successfully grapple with them, prompted one of its dissident members to put the matter into historical

context. Speaking of the switch to digital broadcasting, former FCC chair Newton Minow said, “[O]ur grandchildren will one day regret our failure to meet one of the great communication opportunities in the history of democracy.” They will conclude, Minow added, “that our generation believed that from those to whom much is given, nothing much is required in return” (quoted in McChesney, *Rich* 159).

Conclusion

In writing about the coming digital television conversion, Nolan Bowie and Hugh Carter Donahue note that digital media “could begin the slow fade out of broadcast network economics in which broadcasters vie over advertising revenues for delivering the largest numbers of an increasingly fragmented mass audience through duplicative programming” (128). It is small wonder, then, that these authors see the digital transition—looking through the eyes of today’s commercial broadcasters—as a frequency grab that offers little hope for new entrants into the business, and almost no possibility that digital spectrum will be returned to the American public (129). Certain new program streams aside, the same can be said about the future prospects of public service broadcasting via digital radio. Public broadcasters and a handful of other vendors will offer useful content, especially in the area of political communication. But many Americans will not, for financial and other reasons, rush to buy receiving equipment capable of handling content from satellite or Internet providers. Also, public radio in the United States now offers a relatively limited form of public service; only one in ten Americans now listens to it, and those listeners can generally be described as well educated, well-off, and mostly white (Witherspoon and Kovitz 98–99).

Perhaps a better pathway for democratizing America’s digital radio system is the development of a greater number of small-scale, listener-responsive outlets. Stations that carry programs from the Pacifica network have generally been considered part of the community radio movement, an alternative form of broadcasting designed to fill the programming needs of people who are missed by commercial, mass-marketed formats. More recently, variations on this theme have come even closer to delivering the sort of content that is most important to low-income and underserved Americans: “content about employment, education and business development; information that can be clearly understood by limited-literacy users; information in multiple languages; and opportunities [for listeners] to create content and interact with it so it is culturally appropriate” (“Content” 1). Some current NPR affiliates, such as KUNM in Albuquerque, New Mexico, carry the network’s marquee newsmagazines while also running more progressive programs such as Pacifica’s *Democracy Now!!*, David Barsamian’s *Alternative Radio* and *Native America Calling* (“KUNM”). Other stations—espe-

cially those that belong to the Grassroots Radio Coalition—aspire to these same ideals with shows that are tied more closely to the local community and, in most cases, drawn from a universe of programs that lie outside of NPR's orbit. For instance, WERU in Blue Hill, Maine, offers a wildly eclectic schedule of music shows, mixed with locally produced programs such as *Economic Literacy 101*, *Science and Society*, and *Talk of the Towns* ("WERU").

These community-based stations aspire to truly democratic forms of radio—program schedules that seek to level the informational playing field that lies between society's haves and have-nots. While templates for this sort of radio already exist, the prospect of growing a disparate band of stations into a stronger national movement in the digital age presents clear logistical challenges. The "educational" portion of the FM dial is already overcrowded in mid- and large-sized American cities, with multiple NPR affiliates in the top markets. Thus the spread of grassroots or community radio in the new millennium will necessarily be tied to (1) the maintenance of NPR and Pacifica affiliates that already build their schedules around community needs, (2) the construction and licensing of new full-power community stations in rural and other underserved areas, (3) the procurement of funds to help these stations change to digital transmission technologies, and (4) the further development of low-power FM (LPFM).

LPFM stations, which would operate on the neighborhood scale with power of 100 watts or less, are seen by former FCC chairman William Kennard as an important vehicle for giving schools, churches, social service agencies, and other community groups a chance to make programs that ordinarily would not air on other stations (see *Microradio.org*). One FCC official reports that the prospect of low-power FM has triggered more mail, e-mail, and phone messages to the agency—much of it from LPFM supporters—than any other telecommunications issue in decades (Stewart). However, America's commercial and public radio broadcasters have opposed the FCC's decision to license LPFM stations, claiming they would interfere with their own broadcast signals. FCC engineers have refuted these claims, and the agency has in fact cleared the way for the granting of 255 LPFM licenses. However, Congress severely reduced the scope of LPFM deployment in late 2000; thus, the future of this small-scale radio alternative is in the hands of various interest groups that continue to pressure lawmakers in Washington (US FCC *Statement*; "Over 500," 2).

Perhaps it is time for those Americans who wish to enhance radio's public service function in the digital era to borrow a favorite term from corporations that have consolidated rapidly in other deregulated fields: the "grand alliance." It would be truly fascinating to see progressive NPR and Pacifica affiliates, community and grassroots stations, and new LPFM licensees unite for the purpose of producing, sharing, and broadcasting programs that meet the needs of those not served by other radio stations. In order for this to happen, a wide cross section of concerned citizens must work to rebuild a viable broadcast reform

movement in the United States. This task would entail the building of coalitions among minority, low-income, labor, and other interested groups, along with an analysis of why other broadcast reform efforts have failed (Mosco). Such a process of coalition-building could take several years, but if it is done carefully, this sort of effort could one day enable the creation of a Public Broadcasting Trust, which in turn would provide a certain percentage of annual funding for community-scale radio stations. Daunting as this task may seem, groups such as Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting have shown that the PBT ideal is more than just a passing fancy. Whatever the specific pathway, advocates for better radio must now move beyond the “baby steps” of intellectual commitment to active participation in a movement to renew public service commitments at the systemic level. Only through this level of change—and of corresponding change in America’s overall political culture—will the ideal of good citizenship come to enjoy the same status in media discourse that consumerism now does.

Notes

1. To be fair, the Eureka system would require stations in a given region to share transmission facilities and adopt the same power and coverage configurations. Deployment of this system would thus entail another reallocation of radio spectrum and would, in a very real sense, change the valuation of radio properties. This much is true; radio broadcasters who vilify the Eureka system, however, are making a statement about policy preference and not about an irrefutable social fact.

2. Gannett’s support for USADR marked its first foray into radio broadcasting, though the company has many other media holdings. Gannett is, for example, the largest American newspaper group, and also owns and operates twenty-two TV stations. The broadcasting properties formerly owned by Westinghouse are now part of the Viacom/CBS empire, which either operates or provides programs for more than 7,500 radio stations through its various subsidiaries. USADR (now iBiquity Digital Corporation) is also owned in part by ABC. For further details, see the Gannett Web site <<http://www.gannett.com/map/gan007.htm>>, the Westwood One (Viacom) site <<http://www2.cbsradio.com/ww1/index.htm>>, and the USADR site <<http://www.usadr.com/aboutus.html>>.

3. For a fuller textual and graphical depiction of an IBOC system under development, see the comments that USADR filed in response to the FCC’s *Notice of Proposed Rule Making* regarding DAB (US FCC, *Comments*).

4. The XM allocation is less susceptible to interference and thus has been deemed to hold greater profit potential (see “DARS Winners”).

5. *Broadband* is a term used to describe any transmission medium that can simultaneously handle hundreds of audio and video channels, telephone calls, and a wide variety of high-speed data applications end to end. These services are most commonly delivered by cable and telephone companies and other “telcos” that have begun to use fiber-optic technology. “Wireless broadband” refers to the same sort of high-speed transmissions outlined above, but without the need for wires or cables (see McNamara).

6. These suggested reform measures, described more fully in the following pages, were culled from a larger list of recommendations by the Gore Commission and augmented by the author’s own research. A complete text of the Gore Commission’s report is available at <<http://www.benton.org/PIAC/report.html>>. An excellent summary of this report is also available through *Current Online* at <<http://www.current.org/dtv/dtv823g.html>>.

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